

A
DISSERTATION
ON
MIRACLES:

CONTAINING

An Examination of the Principles advanced by DAVID HUME, Esq;

In an ESSAY on MIRACLES.

By GEORGE CAMPBELL, D. D.

Principal of the Marischal College, and one
of the Ministers, of ABERDEEN.

*The works that I do in my Father's name, they
bear witness of me. JOHN X. 25.*

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THE END OF THE LINE

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TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
JOHN EARL OF BUTE,
ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S PRINCIPAL
SECRETARIES OF STATE,
CHANCELLOR OF THE MARISCHAL
COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN,

THE FOLLOWING DISSERTATION,
IN DEFENCE OF A RELIGION,
OF WHICH HE IS AN EMINENT PA-
TRON AND EXAMPLE,

IS,
WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT
AND GRATITUDE,

INSCRIB'D BY
HIS LORDSHIP'S
MOST DUTIFUL,
MOST DEVOTED, AND
MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

GEORGE CAMPBELL.

March 2. 1762.

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'TIS not the only, nor even the chief, design of these sheets, to refute the reasoning and objections of Mr Hume, with regard to miracles: the chief design of them is, to set the principal argument for Christianity in its proper light. On a subject that hath been so often treated, 'tis impossible to avoid saying many things which have been said before. It may, however, with reason be affirmed, that there still remains, on this subject, great scope for new observations. Besides, it ought to be remember'd, that the evidence of any complex argument depends very much on the order into which the material circumstances are digested, and the manner in which they are display'd.

The Essay on Miracles deserves to be consider'd, as one of the most dangerous attacks that have been made on our religion. The danger results not solely from the merit of THE PIECE; it results

results much more from that of THE AUTHOR. The piece itself, like every other work of Mr Hume, is ingenious; but its merit is more of the oratorical kind than of the philosophical. The merit of the author, I acknowledge, is great. The many useful volumes he hath published of history, as well as on criticism, politics, and trade, have justly procur'd him, with all persons of taste and discernment, the highest reputation as a writer. What pity is it, that this reputation should have been sullied by attempts to undermine the foundations both of natural religion, and of reveal'd!

For my own part, I think it a piece of justice in me, to acknowledge the obligations I owe the author, before I enter on the propos'd examination. I have not only been much entertain'd and instructed by his works; but, if I am possess'd of any talent in abstract reasoning, I am not a little indebted to what he hath written on human nature, for the improvement of that talent.

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lent. If therefore, in this tract, I have refuted Mr Hume's Essay, the greater share of the merit is perhaps to be ascrib'd to Mr Hume himself. The compliment which the Russian monarch, after the famous battle of Poltowa, paid the Swedish generals, when he gave them the honourable appellation of his masters in the art of war, I may, with great sincerity, pay my acute and ingenious adversary.

I shall add a few things concerning the occasion and form of the following dissertation.

Some of the principal topics here discuss'd, were more briefly treated in a sermon preached before the synod of ABERDEEN, and are now made public at their desire. To the end that an argument of so great importance might be more fully and freely canvass'd than it could have been, with propriety, in a sermon, it was judg'd necessary to new-model the discourse, and to give it that form in which it now appears.

The

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*The edition of Mr Hume's essays to which I always refer in this work, is that printed at LONDON, in duodecimo, 1750, intitled, Philosophical essays concerning human understanding. I have, since finishing this tract, seen a later edition, in which there are a few variations. None of them appear'd to me so material, as to give ground for altering the quotations and references here us'd. There is indeed one alteration, which candour requir'd that I should mention: I have accordingly mention'd it in a note *.*

The arguments of the essayist I have endeavour'd to refute by argument. Mere declamation I know no way of refuting, but by analysing it; nor do I conceive how inconsistencies can be answer'd otherwise than by exposing them. In such analysis and exposition, which, I own, I have attempted without ceremony or reserve, an air of ridicule is unavoidable: but this ridi-

* page 163. 164.

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cule, *I am well aware, if founded in misrepresentation, will at last rebound upon myself. It is possible, that, in some things, I have mistaken the author's meaning; I am conscious, that I have not, in any thing, designedly misrepresented it.*

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INTRODUCTION.

“CHRISTIANITY,” it hath been said, “is not founded in argument.” If it were only meant by these words, that the religion of Jesus could not, by the single aid of reasoning, produce its full effect upon the heart; every true Christian would chearfully subscribe to them. No arguments unaccompanied by the influences of the Holy Spirit, can convert the soul from sin to God; though even to such conversion, arguments are, by the agency of the Spirit, render’d subservient. Again, if we were to understand by this aphorism, that the principles of our religion could never have been discover’d, by the natural and unassisted faculties of man; this position, I presume, would be as little disputed as the former. But if, on the contrary, under the cover of an ambiguous expression, it is intended to insinuate, that those principles, from their very nature, can admit no rational evidence of their truth, (and this, by the way, is the only meaning which can avail our antagonists) the gospel, as well as common sense, loudly reclaims against it.

The Lord JESUS CHRIST, the author of our religion, often argu’d, both with his
A disciples

2 I N T R O D U C T I O N.

disciples and with his adversaries, as with reasonable men, on the principles of reason. Without this faculty, he well knew, they could not be susceptible either of religion or of law. He argu'd from prophecy, and the conformity of the event to the prediction *. He argu'd from the testimony of John the Baptist, who was generally acknowledged to be a prophet †. He argu'd from the miracles which he himself perform'd ‡, as uncontroversible evidences, that God Almighty operated by him, and had sent him. He expostulates with his enemies, that they did not use their reason on this subject. *Why, says he, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right || ?* In like manner we are called upon by the apostles of our Lord, to act the part of *wise men*, and *judge impartially of what they say ***. Those who do so, are highly commended, for the candour and prudence they discover, in an affair of so great consequence ††. We are even commanded, to be *always ready to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of our hope ‡‡; in meekness to instruct them that oppose themselves |||; and earnestly*

* Luke xxiv. 25. &c. John v. 39. & 46. † John v. 32. & 33. ‡ John v. 36. x. 25. 37. 38. xiv. 10. 11.
 || Luke xii. 57. ** 1 Cor. x. 15. †† Acts xvii. 11.
 ‡‡ 1 Peter iii. 15. ||| 2 Tim. ii. 25.

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to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints *. God has neither in natural nor reveal'd religion, *left himself without a witness*; but has in both given moral and external evidence, sufficient to convince the impartial, to silence the gainsayer, and to render inexcusable the atheist and the unbeliever. This evidence it is our duty to attend to, and candidly to examine. We must *prove all things*, as we are expressly enjoin'd in holy writ, if we would ever hope to *hold fast that which is good* †.

THUS much I thought proper to premise, not to serve as an apology for the design of this tract, (the design surely needs no apology, whatever the world may judge of the execution) but to expose the shallowness of that pretext, under which the advocates for infidelity in this age commonly take shelter. Whilst therefore we enforce an argument, which, in support of our religion, was so frequently insisted on by its divine founder, we will not dread the reproachful titles of *dangerous friends*, or *disguised enemies* of revelation. Such are the titles, which the writer, whose sentiments we propose in these papers to canvass, hath bestow'd on his antagonists ‡; not,

* Jude 3. † 1 Thess. v. 21. ‡ p. 204.

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I believe, through malice against them, but as a sort of excuse for himself, or at least a handle for introducing a very strange and unmeaning compliment to the religion of his country, after a very bold attempt to undermine it. We will however do him the justice to own, that he hath put it out of our power to retort the charge. No intelligent person, who hath carefully perused the *Essay on Miracles*, will impute to the author either of those ignominious characters.

My *primary* intention in undertaking an answer to the aforesaid essay, hath invariably been, to contribute all in my power, to the defence of a *religion*, which I esteem the greatest blessing conferred by Heaven on the sons of men. It is at the same time a *secondary* motive of considerable weight, to vindicate *philosophy*, at least that most important branch of it which ascertains the rules of reasoning, from those absurd consequences, which this author's theory naturally leads us to. The theme is arduous. The adversary is both subtle and powerful. With such an adversary, I should on very unequal terms enter the lists, had I not the advantage of being on the side of truth. And an eminent advantage this doubtless is. It requires but moderate abilities to speak in defence of a good cause. A good cause demands but

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a distinct exposition and a fair hearing; and we may say with great propriety, it will speak for itself. But to adorn error with the semblance of truth, and *make the worse appear the better reason*, requires all the arts of ingenuity and invention; arts in which few or none have been more expert than Mr Hume. It is much to be regretted, that on some occasions he hath so ill applied them.



A
DISSERTATION
ON
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PART I.

Miracles are capable of proof from testimony, and religious miracles are not less capable of this evidence than others.

SECTION I.

Mr Hume's favourite argument is founded on a false hypothesis.

IT is not the aim of this author to evince, that miracles, if admitted to be true, would not be a sufficient evidence of a divine mission. His design is solely to prove, that

that miracles which have not been the objects of our own senses, at least such as are said to have been performed in attestation of any religious system, cannot reasonably be admitted by us, or believ'd on the testimony of others. "A miracle," says he, "supported by any human testimony, is more properly a subject of derision than of argument *." Again, in the conclusion of his essay, "Upon the whole, it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle, can ever possibly amount to a probability, much less to a proof †." Here he concludes against all miracles. "*Any kind of miracle*" are his express words. He seems however immediately sensible, that in asserting this, he hath gone too far; and therefore, in the end of the same paragraph, retracts part of what he had advanced in the beginning. "We may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force, as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any system of religion." In the note on this passage, he has these words. "I beg the limitation here made, may be remarked, when I say, that a miracle can never be prov'd, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own that otherwise there may possibly be

* p. 194.

† p. 202.

“ miracles, or violations of the usual course
 “ of nature, of such a kind, as to admit of
 “ proof from human testimony.”

So much for that cardinal point, which the essayist labours so strenuously to evince; and which, if true, will not only be subversive of revelation, as receiv'd by us, on the testimony of the apostles, and prophets, and martyrs; but will directly lead to this general conclusion: ‘ That it is impossible for
 ‘ God Almighty to give a revelation, attend-
 ‘ ed with such evidence, that it can be rea-
 ‘ sonably believed in after-ages, or even in
 ‘ the same age, by any person who hath not
 ‘ been an eye-witness of the miracles, by
 ‘ which it is supported.’

Now by what wonderful process of reasoning is this strange conclusion made out? Several topics have been employ'd for the purpose by this subtle disputant. Among these there is one principal argument, which he is at great pains to set off, to the best advantage. Here indeed he claims a particular concern, having discover'd it himself. His title to the honour of the discovery, 'tis not my business to controvert; I confine myself entirely to the consideration of its importance. To this end I shall now lay before the reader, the unanswerable argument, as he flatters

flatters himself it will be found; taking the freedom, for brevity's sake, to compendize the reasoning, and to omit whatever is said merely for illustration. To do otherwise would lay me under the necessity of transcribing the greater part of the essay.

' Experience,' says he, ' is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact *.' Experience is in some things variable, in some things uniform. A variable experience gives rise only to probability; an uniform experience amounts to a proof †. Probability always supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence proportion'd to the superiority. In such cases we must balance the opposite experiments, and deduct the lesser number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence ‡. Our belief or assurance of any fact from the report of eye-witnesses, is derived from no other principle than experience; that is, our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses §. Now if the fact attested partakes of the marvellous, if it is such as has

* p. 174.

† p. 175. 176.

‡ p. 176.

§ ib.

' seldom

‘ seldom fallen under our observation, here
 ‘ is a contest of two opposite experiences, of
 ‘ which the one destroys the other, as far as
 ‘ its force goes, and the superior can only o-
 ‘ perate on the mind by the force which re-
 ‘ mains. The very same principle of expe-
 ‘ rience, which gives us a certain degree of
 ‘ assurance, in the testimony of witnesses,
 ‘ gives us also, in this case, another degree
 ‘ of assurance, against the fact which they en-
 ‘ deavour to establish ; from which contra-
 ‘ diction, there necessarily arises a counter-
 ‘ poise, and mutual destruction of belief and
 ‘ authority *. Further, if the fact affirmed
 ‘ by the witnesses, instead of being only mar-
 ‘ vellous, is really miraculous ; if besides, the
 ‘ testimony consider’d apart and in itself, a-
 ‘ mounts to an entire proof ; in that case
 ‘ there is proof against proof, of which the
 ‘ strongest must prevail, but still with a dimi-
 ‘ nution of its force, in proportion to that
 ‘ of its antagonist. A miracle is a violation of
 ‘ the laws of nature ; and as a firm and unal-
 ‘ terable experience has established these laws,
 ‘ the proof against a miracle from the very
 ‘ nature of the fact, is as entire, as any argu-
 ‘ ment from experience can possibly be ima-
 ‘ gined †. And if so, ’tis an undeniable con-

* p. 179.

† p. 180.

‘ sequence,

'sequence, that it cannot be surmounted by
'any proof whatever from testimony. A mi-
'racle therefore, however attested, can never
'be render'd credible, even in the lowest de-
'gree.' This, in my apprehension, is the sum
of the argument, on which my ingenious op-
ponent rests the strength of his cause.

IN answer to this I propose first to prove,
that the whole is built upon a false hypothe-
sis. That the evidence of testimony is deri-
ved solely from experience, which seems to
be an axiom of this writer, is at least not so
incontestable a truth, as he supposes it; that,
on the contrary, testimony hath a natural and
original influence on belief, antecedent to ex-
perience, will, I imagine, easily be evinced.
For this purpose let it be remark'd, that the
earliest assent, which is given to testimony
by children, and which is previous to all ex-
perience, is in fact the most unlimited; that
by a gradual experience of mankind, it is
gradually contracted, and reduced to nar-
rower bounds. To say therefore that our dif-
fidence in testimony is the result of experi-
ence, is more philosophical, because more
consonant to truth, than to say that our faith
in testimony has this foundation. Accord-
ingly youth, which is unexperienced, is cre-
dulous; age, on the contrary, is distrustful.

Exactly

Exactly the reverse would be the case, were this author's doctrine just.

Perhaps it will be said, If experience is allowed to be the only measure of a logical or reasonable faith in testimony, the question, *Whether the influence of testimony on belief, be original or deriv'd?* if 'tis not merely verbal, is at least of no importance in the present controversy. But I maintain it is of the greatest importance. The difference between us is by no means so inconsiderable, as to a careless view it may appear. According to his philosophy, the presumption is against the testimony, or (which amounts to the same thing) there is not the smallest presumption in its favour, till properly supported by experience. According to the explication given above, there is the strongest presumption in favour of the testimony, till properly refuted by experience.

If it be objected by the author, that such a faith in testimony as is prior to experience, must be unreasonable and unphilosophical, because unaccountable; I should reply, that there are, and must be, in human nature, some original grounds of belief, beyond which our researches cannot proceed, and of which therefore 'tis vain to attempt a rational account. I should desire the objector to give a reasonable account of his faith in this principle, that *similar cau-*

ses always produce similar effects; or in this, that the course of nature will be the same to-morrow, that it was yesterday, and is to-day: principles, which he himself acknowledges, are neither intuitively evident, nor deduced from premises; and which nevertheless we are under a necessity of presupposing, in all our reasonings from experience *. I should desire him to give a reasonable account of his faith in the clearest informations of his memory, which he will find it alike impossible either to doubt, or to explain. Indeed memory bears nearly the same relation to experience, that testimony does. Certain it is that the defects and misrepresentations of memory are often corrected by experience. Yet should any person hence infer, that memory derives all its evidence from experience, he would fall into a manifest absurdity. For, on the contrary, experience derives its origin solely from memory, and is nothing else but the general maxims or conclusions, we have form'd, from the comparison of particular facts remember'd. If we had not previously given an implicit faith to memory, we had never been able to acquire experience. When therefore we say that memory, which gives birth to experience, may nevertheless in some instances be

* Sceptical doubts. Part 2.

corrected by experience, no more is imply'd, but that the inferences form'd from the most lively and perspicuous reports of memory, sometimes serve to rectify the mistakes which arise from such reports of this faculty, as are most languid and confus'd. Thus memory, in these instances, may be said to correct itself. The case is often much the same with experience and testimony, as will appear more clearly in the second section, where I shall consider the ambiguity of the word *experience*, as us'd by this author.

BUT how, says Mr Hume, is testimony then to be refuted? Principally in one or other of these two ways: *first*, and most directly, by contradictory testimony; that is, when an equal or greater number of witnesses, equally or more credible, attest the contrary: *secondly*, by such evidence either of the incapacity or baseness of the witnesses, as is sufficient to discredit them. What, rejoins my antagonist, cannot then testimony be confuted by the extraordinary nature of the fact attested? Has this consideration no weight at all? That this consideration hath no weight at all, 'twas never my intention to maintain; that by itself it can very rarely, if ever, amount to a refutation against ample and unexceptionable testimony, I hope to make extremely plain.

Who hath ever denied, that the uncommonness of an event related, is a presumption against its reality; and that chiefly on account of the tendency, which, experience teacheth us, and this author hath observed, some people have to sacrifice truth to the love of wonder *? The question only is, How far does this presumption extend? In the extent which Mr Hume hath assign'd it, he hath greatly exceeded the limits of nature, and consequently of all just reasoning.

In his opinion, "When the fact attested is such as has seldom fallen under our observation, there is a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind, by the force which remains †." There is a metaphysical, I had almost said, a magical *balance* and *arithmetic*, for the weighing and subtracting of evidence, to which he frequently recurs, and with which he seems to fancy he can perform wonders. I wish he had been a little more explicit in teaching us how these rare inventions must be us'd. When a writer of genius and elocution expresses himself in general terms, he will find it an easy matter, to give a plausible appear-

* p. 184.

† p. 179.

ance to things the most unintelligible in nature. Such sometimes is this author's way of writing. In the instance before us he is particularly happy in his choice of metaphors. They are such as are naturally adapted to prepossess a reader in his favour. What candid person can think of suspecting the impartiality of an inquirer, who is for *weighing* in the *scales* of reason, all the arguments on either side? Who can suspect his exactness who determines every thing by a *numerical computation*? Hence it is, that to a superficial view his reasoning appears scarce inferior to demonstration; but, when narrowly canvassed, 'tis impracticable to find an application, of which, in a consistency with good sense, it is capable.

In confirmation of the remark just now made, let us try how his manner of arguing on this point can be applied to a particular instance. For this purpose I make the following supposition. I have liv'd for some years near a ferry. It consists with my knowledge that the passage-boat has a thousand times crossed the river, and as many times return'd safe. An unknown man, whom I have just now met, tells me in a serious manner, that it is lost; and affirms, that he himself standing on the bank, was a spectator of the scene; that he saw the passengers carried down the

stream, and the boat overwhelm'd. No person, who is influenced in his judgment of things, not by philosophical subtilties, but by common sense, a much surer guide, will hesitate to declare, that in such a testimony I have probable evidence of the fact asserted. But if leaving common sense, I shall recur to metaphysics, and submit to be tutor'd in my way of judging by the essayist, he will remind me, "that there is here a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains." I am warn'd, that "the very same principle of experience, which gives me a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of the witness, gives me also, in this case, another degree of assurance, against the fact, which he endeavours to establish, from which contradiction there arises a counterpoise, and mutual destruction of belief and authority *." Well, I would know the truth, if possible; and that I may conclude fairly and philosophically, how must I balance these opposite experiences, as you are pleas'd to term them? Must I set the thousand, or rather the two thousand instances of the one

* p. 179.

side, against the single instance of the other ? In that case, 'tis easy to see, I have nineteen hundred and ninety-nine degrees of evidence, that my information is false. Or is it necessary, in order to make it credible, that the single instance have two thousand times as much evidence, as any of the opposite instances, supposing them equal among themselves ; or supposing them unequal, as much as all the two thousand put together, that there may be at least an equilibrium ? This is impossible. I had for some of those instances, the evidence of sense, which hardly any testimony can equal, much less exceed. Once more, must the evidence I have of the veracity of the witness, be a full equivalent to the two thousand instances, which oppose the fact attested ? By the supposition, I have no positive evidence for or against his veracity, he being a person whom I never saw before. Yet if none of these be the balancing, which the essay-writer means, I despair of being able to discover his meaning.

Is then so weak a proof from testimony incapable of being refuted ? I am far from thinking so ; tho' even so weak a proof could not be overturn'd by such a contrary experience. How then may it be overturn'd ? *First*, by contradictory testimony. Going homewards I meet another person, whom I
know

know as little as I did the former ; finding that he comes from the ferry, I ask him concerning the truth of the report. He affirms, that the whole is a fiction ; that he saw the boat, and all in it, come safe to land. This would do more to turn the scale, than fifty thousand such contrary instances, as were suppos'd. Yet this wou'd not remove suspicion. Indeed, if we were to consider the matter abstractly, one would think, that all suspicion would be remov'd, that the two opposite testimonies would destroy each other, and leave the mind entirely under the influence of its former experience, in the same state as if neither testimony had been given. But this is by no means consonant to fact. When once testimonies are introduced, former experience is generally of no account in the reckoning ; it is but like the dust of the balance, which hath not any sensible effect upon the scales. The mind hangs in suspense between the two contrary declarations, and considers it as one to one, or equal in probability, that the report is true, or that it is false. Afterwards a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, confirm the declaration of the second. I am then quite at ease. Is this the only effectual way of confuting false testimony ? No. I suppose *again*, that instead of meeting with any person who can inform me concerning the fact, I get from

from some, who are acquainted with the witness, information concerning his character. They tell me, he is notorious for lying; and that his lies are commonly forged, not with a view to interest, but merely to gratify a malicious pleasure, which he takes in alarming strangers. This, tho' not so direct a refutation as the former, will be sufficient to discredit his report. In the former, where there is testimony contradicting testimony, the author's metaphor of a balance may be us'd with propriety. The things weigh'd are homogeneous: and when contradictory evidences are presented to the mind, tending to prove positions which cannot be both true, the mind must decide on the comparative strength of the opposite evidences, before it yield to either.

But is this the case in the supposition first made? By no means. The two thousand instances formerly known, and the single instance attested, as they relate to different facts, tho' of a contrary nature, are not contradictory. There is no inconsistency in believing both. There is no inconsistency in receiving the last on weaker evidence, (if it be sufficient evidence) not only than all the former together, but even than any of them singly. Will it be said, that tho' the former instances are not themselves contradictory to the fact recently

cently attested, they lead to a conclusion that is contradictory? I answer, 'Tis true, that the experienced frequency of the conjunction of any two events, leads the mind to infer a similar conjunction in time to come. But let it at the same time be remark'd, that no man considers this inference, as having equal evidence with any one of those past events, on which it is founded, and for the belief of which we have had sufficient testimony. Before then the method recommended by this author can turn to any account, it will be necessary for him to compute and determine with precision, how many hundreds, how many thousands, I might say how many myriads of instances, will confer such evidence on the conclusion founded on them, as will prove an equipoise for the testimony of one ocular witness, a man of probity, in a case of which he is allow'd to be a competent judge.

There is in *arithmetic* a rule called REDUCTION, by which numbers of different denominations are brought to the same denomination. If this ingenious author shall invent a rule in *logic*, analogous to this, for reducing different classes of evidence to the same class, he will bless the world with a most important discovery. Then indeed he will have the honour to establish an everlasting peace in the republic of letters; then we shall have

have the happiness to see controversy of every kind, theological, historical, philosophical, receive its mortal wound : for though, in every question, we could not even then determine with certainty, on which side the truth lay, we could always determine (and that is the utmost the nature of the thing admits) with as much accuracy as geometry and algebra can afford, on which side the probability lay, and in what degree. But till this metaphysical *reduction* is discover'd, 'twill be impossible, where the evidences are of different orders, to ascertain by *subtraction* the superior evidence. We could not but esteem him a novice in arithmetic, who being asked, whether seven pounds or eleven pence make the greater sum, and what is the difference ? should, by attending solely to the numbers, and overlooking the value, conclude that eleven pence were the greater, and that it exceeded the other by four. Must we not be equal novices in reasoning, if we follow the same absurd method ? Must we not fall into as great blunders ? Of as little significancy do we find the balance. Is the value of things heterogeneous to be determin'd merely by weight ? Shall silver be weigh'd against lead, or copper against iron ? If in exchange for a piece of gold, I were offer'd some counters of baser metal, is it not obvious, that till I know
the

the comparative value of the metals, in vain shall I attempt to find what is equivalent, by the assistance either of scales or arithmetic ?

'Tis an excellent observation, and much to the purpose, which the late learned and pious Bishop of Durham, in his admirable performance on the analogy of religion to the course of nature, hath made on this subject. " There is a very strong presumption," says he, " against the most ordinary facts, before " the proof of them, which yet is overcome " by almost any proof. There is a presumption of millions to one against the story of " Cæsar, or of any other man. For suppose " a number of common facts, so and so circumstanced, of which one had no kind of " proof, should happen to come into one's " thoughts, every one would, without any " possible doubt, conclude them to be false. " The like may be said of a single common " fact *." What then, I may subjoin, shall be said of an uncommon fact ? And that an uncommon fact may be prov'd by testimony, hath not yet been made a question. But in order to illustrate the observation above cited, suppose, first, one at random mentions, that at such an hour, of such a day, in such a

* Part 2. chap. 2. § 3.

part of the heavens, a comet *will* appear; the conclusion from experience would not be as millions, but as infinite to one, that the proposition is false. Instead of this, suppose you have the testimony of but one ocular witness, a man of integrity, and skill'd in astronomy, that at such an hour, of such a day, in such a part of the heavens, a comet *did* appear; you will not hesitate one moment to give him credit. Yet all the presumption that was against the truth of the first supposition, tho' almost as strong evidence as experience can afford, was also against the truth of the second, before it was thus attested.

Is it necessary to urge further, in support of this doctrine, that as the water in the canal cannot be made to rise higher than the fountain whence it flows, so it is impossible, that the evidence of testimony, if it proceeded from experience, should ever exceed that of experience, which is its source? Yet that it greatly exceeds this evidence, appears not only from what hath been observ'd already, but still more, from what I shall have occasion to observe in the sequel. One may safely affirm, that no conceivable conclusion from experience, can possess stronger evidence, than that which ascertains us of the regular succession and duration of day and night. The reason is, the instances on which this experience is founded,

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are both without number and without exception. Yet even this conclusion, the author admits, as we shall see in the third section, may, in a particular instance, not only be surmounted, but even annihilated by testimony.

Lastly, let it be observed, that the immediate conclusion from experience is always *general*, and runs thus : ' This is the ordinary course of nature.' ' Such an event may reasonably be expected, where all the circumstances are entirely similar.' But when we descend to particulars, the conclusion becomes weaker, being more indirect. For though all the *known* circumstances be similar, all the *actual* circumstances may not be similar : nor is it possible in any case to be assur'd (our knowledge of things being at best but superficial) that all the *actual* circumstances are *known* to us. On the contrary, the direct conclusion from testimony is always *particular*, and runs thus : ' This is the fact in such an individual instance.' The remark now made will serve both to throw light on some of the preceding observations, and to indicate the proper sphere of each species of evidence. *Experience* of the past is the only rule whereby we can judge concerning the *future* : And as when the sun is below the horizon, we must do the best we can by the light

light of the moon, or even of the stars ; so in all cases where we have no testimony, we are under a necessity of recurring to experience, and of balancing or numbering contrary observations *. But the evidence resulting

* Where-ever such balancing or numbering can take place, the opposite evidences must be entirely similar. It will rarely assist us in judging of facts supported by testimony ; for even where contradictory testimonies come to be considered, you will hardly find, that the characters of the witnesses on the opposite sides are so precisely equal, as that an arithmetical operation will evolve the credibility. In matters of pure experience it hath often place. Hence the computations that have been made of the value of annuities, insurances, and several other commercial articles. In calculations concerning chances, the degree of probability may be determin'd with mathematical exactness. I shall here take the liberty, tho' the matter be not essential to the design of this tract, to correct an oversight in the essayist, who always supposes, that where contrary evidences must be balanced, the probability lies in the remainder or surplus, when the less number is subtracted from the greater. The probability doth not consist in the surplus, but in the ratio, or geometrical proportion, which the numbers on the opposite sides bear to each other. I explain myself thus. In favour of one suppos'd event, there are 100 similar instances, against it 50. In another case under consideration, the fa-

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vourable

ing hence, even in the clearest cases, is acknowledged to be so weak, compar'd with that which results from testimony, that the strongest conviction built merely on the former, may be overturn'd by the slightest proof exhibited by the latter. Accordingly the future hath, in all ages and nations, been denominated the province of conjecture and uncertainty.

FROM what hath been said, the attentive reader will easily discover, that the author's argument against *miracles*, hath not the least affinity to the argument used by Dr Tillotson against *transubstantiation*, with which Mr Hume hath introduced his subject. Let us hear the argument, as it is related in the Essay, from the writings of the Archbishop. " 'Tis
" acknowledged on all hands, says that

favourable instances are 60, and only 10 unfavourable. Tho' the difference, or arithmetical proportion, which is 50, be the same in both cases, the probability is by no means equal, as the author's way of reasoning implies. The probability of the first event is as 100 to 50, or 2 to 1. The probability of the second is as 60 to 10, or 6 to 1. Consequently on comparing the different examples, tho' both be probable, the second is thrice as probable as the first.

learned

“ learned prelate, that the authority either of
 “ the scripture or of tradition, is founded
 “ merely on the testimony of the apostles,
 “ who were eye-witnesses to those miracles of
 “ our Saviour, by which he proved his di-
 “ vine mission. Our evidence then for the
 “ truth of the Christian religion, is less than
 “ the evidence for the truth of our senses;
 “ because even in the first authors of our re-
 “ ligion it was no greater; and ’tis evident, it
 “ must diminish in passing from them to their
 “ disciples; nor can any one be so certain of
 “ the truth of their testimony, as of the im-
 “ mediate objects of his senses. But a weaker
 “ evidence can never destroy a stronger; and
 “ therefore, were the doctrine of the real pre-
 “ sence ever so clearly reveal’d in scripture,
 “ ’twere directly contrary to the rules of just
 “ reasoning to give our assent to it. It con-
 “ tradicts sense, tho’ both the scripture and
 “ tradition, on which it is suppos’d to be
 “ built, carry not such evidence with them as
 “ sense, when they are consider’d merely as
 “ external evidences, and are not brought
 “ home to every one’s breast, by the imme-
 “ diate operation of the Holy Spirit.*” That
 the evidence of *testimony* is less than the evi-
 dence of *sense*, is undeniable. *Sense* is the

* p. 173. 174.

source of that evidence, which is first transferred to the *memory* of the individual, as to a general reservoir, and thence transmitted to others by the channel of *testimony*. That the original evidence can never gain any thing, but must lose, by the transmission, is beyond dispute. What hath been rightly perceived may be misremember'd; what is rightly remember'd may, thro' incapacity, or thro' ill intention, be misreported; and what is rightly reported may be misunderstood. In any of these four ways therefore, either by defect of memory, of elocution, or of veracity in the relater, or by misapprehension in the hearer, there is a chance, that the truth received by the information of the senses, may be misrepresented or mistaken; now every such chance occasions a real diminution of the evidence. That the sacramental elements are bread and wine, not flesh and blood, our sight and touch and taste and smell concur in testifying. If these senses are not to be credited, the apostles themselves could not have evidence of the mission of their master. For the greatest external evidence they had, or could have, of his mission, was that which their senses gave them, of the reality of his miracles. But whatever strength there is in this argument with regard to the apostles, the argument with regard to us, who, for those miracles, have only the evidence,

not

not of our own senses, but of their testimony, is incomparably stronger. In their case, it is sense contradicting sense; in ours it is sense contradicting testimony. But what relation has this to the author's argument? None at all. Testimony, it is acknowledged, is a weaker evidence than sense. But it hath been already evinced, that its evidence for particular facts is infinitely stronger than that which the general conclusions from experience can afford us. Testimony holds directly of memory and sense. Whatever is duly attested must be remember'd by the witness; whatever is duly remember'd must once have been perceiv'd. But nothing similar takes place with regard to experience, nor can testimony, with any appearance of meaning, be said to hold of it.

THUS I have shown, as I propos'd, that the author's reasoning proceeds on a false hypothesis. — It supposeth testimony to derive its evidence solely from experience, which is false. — It supposeth by consequence, that contrary observations have a weight in opposing testimony, which the first and most acknowledged principles of human reason, or, if you like the term better, common sense, evidently shows that they have not. — It assigns a rule for discovering the superiority

superiority of contrary evidences, which, in the latitude there given it, tends to mislead the judgment, and which 'tis impossible, by any explication, to render of real use.

SECTION II.

Mr Hume charged with some fallacies in his way of managing the argument.

IN the essay there is frequent mention of the word *experience*, and much use made of it. 'Tis strange that the author hath not favour'd us with the definition of a term of so much moment to his argument. This defect I shall endeavour to supply; and the rather, as the word appears to be equivocal, and to be us'd by the essayist in two very different senses. The first and most proper signification of the word, which, for distinction's sake, I shall call *personal* experience, is that given in the preceding section. 'It is,' as was observ'd, 'founded in *memory*, and consists solely of the general maxims or conclusions, that each individual hath form'd, from the comparison of the particular facts he hath remember'd.' In the other signification, in which the word is sometimes taken, and which I shall distinguish by the term

term *deriv'd*, it may be thus defin'd. ' It is
 ' founded in *testimony*, and consists not only
 ' of all the experiences of others, which have
 ' thro' that channel been communicated to
 ' us, but of all the general maxims or con-
 ' clusions we have form'd, from the compa-
 ' rison of particular facts attested.'

In proposing his argument, the author would surely be understood to mean only *personal* experience; otherwise, his making testimony derive its light from an experience which derives its light from testimony, would be introducing what logicians term a *circle in causes*. It would exhibit the same things alternately, as causes and effects of each other. Yet nothing can be more limited, than the sense which is convey'd under the term *experience*, in the first acceptation. The merest clown or peasant derives incomparably more knowledge from testimony, and the communicated experience of others, than in the longest life he could have amassed out of the treasure of his own memory. Nay, to such a scanty portion the savage himself is not confin'd. If that therefore must be the rule, the only rule, by which every testimony is ultimately to be judged, our belief in matters of fact must have very narrow bounds. No testimony ought to have any weight with us, that doth not relate an event, similar at least
 to

to some one observation, which we ourselves have had access to make. For example, that there are such people on the earth as negroes, could not, on that hypothesis, be render'd credible to one who had never seen a negro, not even by the most numerous and the most unexceptionable attestations. Against the admission of such testimony, however strong, the whole force of the author's argument evidently operates. But that innumerable absurdities would flow from this principle, I might easily evince, did I not think the task superfluous.

The author himself is aware of the consequences; and therefore, in whatever sense he uses the term *experience* in proposing his argument; in prosecuting it, he with great dexterity shifts the sense, and ere the reader is apprised, insinuates another. " 'Tis a miracle," says he, " that a dead man should come to life, because that has never been observ'd in any age or country. There must therefore be an uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation *." Here the phrase, *an uniform experience against an event*, in the latter clause, is implicitly defin'd in the former,

* p. 181.

not what has never been observ'd BY US, but (mark his words) *what has never been observ'd* IN ANY AGE OR COUNTRY. Now, what has been observ'd, and what has not been observ'd, in all ages and countries, pray how can you, Sir, or I, or any man, come to the knowledge of ? Only I suppose by testimony, oral or written. The personal experience of every individual is limited to but a part of one age, and commonly to a narrow spot of one country. If there be any other way of being made acquainted with facts, 'tis to me, I own, an impenetrable secret ; I have no apprehension of it. If there be not any, what shall we make of that cardinal point, on which his argument turns ? 'Tis in plain language, ' Testimony is not intitled to the least degree of faith, but as far as it is supported by such an extensive experience, as if we had not had a previous and independent faith in testimony, we could never have acquir'd.'

How natural is the transition from one sophism to another ! You will soon be convinced of this, if you attend but a little to the strain of the argument. " A miracle," says he, " is a violation of the laws of nature ; and as a firm and unalterable experience hath established these laws, the
" proof

“proof against a miracle is as entire, as any
 “argument from experience can possibly be
 “imagined *.” Again, “As an uniform
 “experience amounts to a proof, there is
 “here a direct and full proof, from the na-
 “ture of the fact, against the existence of any
 “miracle †.” I must once more ask the au-
 thor, What is the precise meaning of the
 words *firm, unalterable, uniform*? An ex-
 perience that admits no exception, is surely
 the only experience, which can with propriety
 be term’d *uniform, firm, unalterable*. Now
 since, as was remark’d above, the far greater
 part of this experience, which compriseth e-
 very age and every country, must be deriv’d
 to us from testimony; that the experience
 may be *firm, uniform, unalterable*, there must
 be no contrary testimony whatever. Yet by
 the author’s own hypothesis, the miracles he
 would thus confute, are supported by testi-
 mony. At the same time to give strength to
 his argument, he is under a necessity of sup-
 posing, that there is no exception from the
 testimonies against them. Thus he falls into
 that paralogism, which is called *begging the*
question. What he gives with one hand, he
 takes with the other. He admits, in open-

* p. 180.

† p. 181.

ing his design, what in his argument he implicitly denies.

But that this, if possible, may be still more manifest, let us attend a little to some expressions, which one would imagine he had inadvertently dropt. "So long," says he, "as the world endures, I presume, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all profane history *." Why does he presume so? A man so much-attach'd to experience, can hardly be suspected to have any other reason than this; because such accounts have hitherto been found in all the histories, profane as well as sacred, of times past. But we need not recur to an inference to obtain this acknowledgment. It is often to be met with in the essay. In one place we learn, that the witnesses for miracles are an infinite number †; in another, that all religious records of whatever kind abound with them ‡. I leave it therefore to the author to explain, with what consistency he can assert, that the laws of nature are establish'd by an uniform experience, (which experience is chiefly the result of testimony) and at the same time allow, that almost all human histories are full of the relations of miracles and prodigies, which are violations of these

* p. 174.

† p. 190.

‡ p. 191.

laws. Here is, by his own confession, testimony against testimony, and very ample on both sides. How then can one side claim a firm, uniform, and unalterable support from testimony?

It will be in vain to object, that the testimony in support of the laws of nature, greatly exceeds the testimony for the violations of these laws; and that, if we are to be determin'd by the greater number of observations, we shall reject all miracles whatever. I ask, Why are the testimonies much more numerous in the one case than in the other? The answer is obvious: Natural occurrences are much more frequent than such as are preternatural. But are all the accounts we have of the pestilence to be rejected as incredible, because, in this country, we hear not so often of that disease, as of the fever? Or, because the number of natural births is infinitely greater than that of monsters, shall the evidence of the former be regarded as a confutation of all that can be advanced in proof of the latter? Such an objector needs to be reminded of what was prov'd in the foregoing section; that the opposite testimonies relate to different facts, and are therefore not contradictory; that the conclusion founded on them, possesseth not the evidence of the facts on which it is founded, but only such a presumptive

sumptive evidence, as may be surmounted by the slightest positive proof. A general conclusion from experience is in comparison but presumptive and indirect; sufficient testimony for a particular fact is direct and positive evidence.

I SHALL remark one other fallacy in this author's reasoning, before I conclude this section. "The Indian prince," says he, "who refus'd to believe the first relations concerning the effects of frost, reasoned justly; and it naturally required very strong testimony to engage his assent to facts, which arose from a state of nature, with which he was unacquainted, and bore so little analogy to those events, of which he had had constant and uniform experience. Tho' they were not contrary to his experience, they were not conformable to it *." Here a distinction is artfully suggested, between what is *contrary* to experience, and what is *not conformable* to it. The one he allows may be prov'd by testimony, but not the other. A distinction, for which the author seems to have so great use, it will not be improper to examine.

* p. 179.

If my reader happen to be but little acquainted with Mr Hume's writings, or even with the piece here examin'd, I must intreat him, ere he proceed any farther, to give the essay an attentive perusal; and to take notice particularly, whether in one single passage, he can find any other sense given to the terms *contrary to experience*, but that which has *not* been *experienced*. Without this aid, I should not be surpris'd, that I found it difficult to convince the judicious, that a man of so much acuteness, one so much a philosopher as this author, should, with such formality, make a distinction, which not only the essay, but the whole tenour of his philosophical writings, shows evidently to have no meaning. Is that which is contrary to experience a synonymous phrase for that which implies a contradiction? If this were the case, there would be no need to recur to experience for a refutation; it would refute itself. But 'tis equitable that the author himself be heard, who ought to be the best interpreter of his own words. "When the fact "attested," says he, "is such a one, as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a "contest of two opposite experiences*." In this passage, not the being *never* experienced, but even the being *seldom* experienced,

* P. 179.

constitutes an *opposite* experience. I can conceive no way but one, that the author can evade the force of this quotation; and that is, by obtruding on us, some new distinction between an *opposite* and a *contrary* experience. In order to preclude such an attempt, I shall once more recur to his own authority. “ ’Tis no miracle that a man in seeming good health, should die of a sudden.” Why? “ Because such a kind of death, tho’ more unusual than any other, hath yet been frequently observ’d to happen. But ’tis a miracle that a dead man should come to life.” Why? Not because of any inconsistency in the thing. That a body should be this hour inanimate, and the next animated, is no more inconsistent, than the reverse, that it should be this hour animated, and the next inanimate; though the one be common, and not the other. But the author himself answers the question: “ Because that has never been observ’d in any age or country *.” All the contrariety then that there is in miracles to experience, doth, by his own concession, consist solely in this, that they have never been observ’d; that is, they are not conformable to experience. To his experience personal or deriv’d, he must certainly mean; to what he

* p. 181.

has had access to learn of different ages and countries. To speak beyond the knowledge he hath attain'd, would be ridiculous. It would be first supposing a miracle, and then inferring a contrary experience, instead of concluding from experience, that the fact is miraculous.

Now I insist, that as far as regards the author's argument, a fact perfectly unusual, or not conformable to our experience, such a fact as, for aught we have had access to learn, was never observ'd in any age or country, is as incapable of proof from testimony, as miracles are ; that, if this writer would argue consistently, he could never, on his own principles, reject the one, and admit the other. Both ought to be rejected, or neither. I would not, by this, be thought to signify, that there is no difference between a miracle and an extraordinary event. I know that the former implies the interposal of an invisible agent, which is not implied in the latter. All that I intend to assert, is, that the author's argument equally affects them both. Why doth such interposal appear to him incredible ? Not from any incongruity he discerns in the thing itself. He doth not pretend it. But 'tis not conformable to his experience. " A miracle," says he,
" is

“is a transgression of a law of nature *.” But how are the laws of nature known to us? By experience. What is the criterion, whereby we must judge, whether the laws of nature are transgressed? Solely the conformity or disconformity of events to our experience. This writer surely will not pretend, that we can have any knowledge *a priori*, either of the law, or of the violation.

Let us then examine by his own principles, whether the King of Siam, of whom the story he alludes to, is related by Locke †, could have sufficient evidence, from testimony, of a fact so contrary to his experience, as the freezing of water. He could just say as much of this event, as the author can say of a dead man's being restor'd to life. ‘Such a thing ‘was never observ'd, as far as I could learn, ‘in any age or country.’ If the things themselves too are impartially consider'd, and independently of the notions acquir'd by us in these northern climates, we should account the first at least as extraordinary as the second. That so pliant a body as water should become hard like pavement, so as to bear up an elephant on its surface, is as unlikely in itself,

* p. 182. in the note.

† Essay on human understanding, book 4. chap. 15. § 5.

that

that a body inanimate to-day, should be animated to-morrow. Nay, to the Indian monarch, I must think, that the first wou'd appear more a miracle, more contrary to experience, than the second. If he had been acquainted with *ice* or frozen water, and afterwards seen it become fluid, but had never seen nor learn'd, that after it was melted, it became hard again, the relation must have appeared marvellous, as the process from fluidity to hardness never had been experienced, tho' the reverse often had. But I believe nobody will question, that on this supposition it would not have appeared quite so strange, as it did. Yet this supposition makes the instance more parallel to the restoring of the dead to life. The process from animate to inanimate we are all acquainted with; and what is such a restoration, but the reversing of this process? So little reason had the author to insinuate, that the one was only *not conformable*, the other *contrary* to experience. If there be a difference in this respect, the first, to one alike unacquainted with both, must appear the more contrary of the two.

Does it alter the matter, that he calls the former "a fact which arose from a state of nature, with which the Indian was unacquainted?" Was not such a state quite unconformable, or (which in the author's language

I have shewn to be the same) contrary to his experience? Is then a state of nature which is contrary to experience, more credible than a single fact contrary to experience? I want the solution of one difficulty: The author, in order to satisfy me, presents me with a thousand others. Is this suitable to the method he proposes in another place, of admitting always the less miracle, and rejecting the greater *? Is it not, on the contrary, admitting without any difficulty the greater miracle, and thereby removing the difficulty, which he otherwise would have had in admitting the less? Does he forget, that to exhibit a state of nature entirely different from what we experience at present, is one of those enormous prodigies, which, in his account, render the Pentateuch unworthy of credit †? “No Indian,” says he in the note, “’tis evident, cou’d have experience that “water did not freeze in cold climates. This “is placing nature in a situation quite unknown “to him, and ’tis impossible for him to tell *a* “*priori*, what will result from it.” This is precisely, as if, in reply to the author’s objection from experience against the raising of a dead man (suppose Lazarus) to life, I should retort: ‘Neither you, Sir, nor any who live ‘in this century can have experience, that a ‘dead man could not be restor’d to life at the

* p. 182.

† p. 206.

‘ command

‘command of one divinely commission’d to
‘give a revelation to men. This is placing
‘nature in a situation quite unknown to you,
‘and ’tis impossible for you to tell *a priori*,
‘what will result from it. This therefore is
‘not contrary to the course of nature, in ca-
‘ses where all the circumstances are the same.
‘As you never saw one vested with such a
‘commission, you are as unexperienced, as
‘ignorant of this point, as the inhabitants of
‘Sumatra are of the frosts in Muscovy; you
‘cannot therefore reasonably, any more than
‘they, be positive as to the consequences.’
Should he rejoin, as doubtless he would,
‘This is not taking away the difficulty; but,
‘like the elephant and the tortoise, in the ac-
‘count given by some barbarians of the man-
‘ner in which the earth is supported, it only
‘shifts the difficulty a step further back. My
‘objection still recurs. That any man should
‘be endow’d with such power is contrary to
‘experience, and therefore incredible:’ Should
he, I say, rejoin in this manner, I could only
add, ‘Pray, Sir, revise your own words
‘lately quoted, and consider impartially whe-
‘ther they be not as glaringly expos’d to the
‘like reply.’ For my part, I can only per-
ceive one difference that is material between
the two cases. You frankly confess, that
with regard to the freezing of water, besides the
the

the absolute want of experience, there would be from analogy a presumption against it, which ought to weigh with a rational Indian. I think, on the contrary, in the case suppos'd by me, of one commission'd by Heaven, there is at least no presumption against the exertion of such a miraculous power. There is rather a presumption in its favour,

Does the author then say, that no testimony could give the King of Siam sufficient evidence of the effects of cold on water? No. By implication he says the contrary: "It required very strong testimony." Will he say, that those most astonishing effects of electricity lately discover'd, so entirely unanalogous to every thing before experienced, will he say, that such facts no reasonable man could have sufficient evidence from testimony to believe? No. We may presume, he will not, from his decision in the former case; and if he should, the common sense of mankind would reclaim against his extravagance. Yet 'tis obvious to every considerate reader, that his argument concludes equally against those truly marvellous, as against miraculous events; both being alike unconformable, or alike contrary to former experience*.

THUS

* I cannot forbear to observe, that many of the principal terms employ'd in the essay, are us'd in a manner

THUS I think I have shown, that the author is chargeable with some fallacies, in his way of managing the argument ; that he all along avails himself of an ambiguity in the word *experience* ; — that his reasoning includes

a

manner extremely vague and unphilosophical. I have remark'd the confusion I find in the application of the words, *experience, contrariety, conformity*. I might remark the same thing of the word, *miracle*. "A miracle," 'tis said, p. 182. in the note, "may be accurately defin'd, A TRANSGRESSION of a law of nature, by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposal of some invisible agent." The word *transgression* invariably denotes a criminal opposition to authority. The author's accuracy in representing God as a transgressor, I have not indeed the perspicacity to discern. Does he intend, by throwing something monstrous into the definition, to infuse into the reader a prejudice against the thing defin'd ? But supposing that thro' inadvertency, he had us'd the term *transgression*, instead of *suspension*; which would have been both intelligible and proper ; one would at least expect, that the word *miracle* in the essay, always express the sense of the definition. But this it evidently does not. Thus in the instance of the miracle suppos'd (p. 203. in the note) he calls it, in the beginning of the paragraph, "A violation of the usual course of nature ;" but in the end, after telling us that such

a *petitio principii* in the bosom of it ; — and that, in supporting his argument, he must have recourse to distinctions, where, even himself being judge, there is no difference.

such a miracle, on the evidence suppos'd, “ our present philosophers ought to receive for certain,” he subjoins, (how consistently, let the reader judge) “ and ought to search for the causes, whence it might be deriv'd.” Thus it is insinuated, that tho' a fact apparently miraculous, and perfectly extraordinary, might be admitted by a philosopher, still the reality of the miracle must be denied. For if the interposal of the Deity be the proper solution of the phenomenon, why should we recur to natural causes? Hence a careless reader is insensibly led to think, that there is some special incredibility in such an interposal, distinct from its *uncommonness*. Yet the author's great argument is built on this single circumstance, and places such an interposition just on the same footing with every event that is equally uncommon. At one time, he uses the word *miracle* to denote a *bare improbability*, as will appear in the sixth section: at another, *absurd* and *miraculous* are, with him, synonymous terms; so are also the *miraculous nature* of an event, and its *absolute impossibility*. Is this the style and manner of a reasoner?

SECTION. III.

Mr Hume himself gives up his favourite argument.

‘**M**R Hume himself,’ methinks I hear my reader repeating with astonishment, ‘gives up his favourite argument! To prove ‘this point is indeed a very bold attempt.’ Yet that this attempt is not altogether so arduous, as at first hearing, he will possibly imagine, I hope, if favour’d a while with his attention, fully to convince him. If to acknowledge, after all, that there may be miracles, which admit of proof from human testimony; if to acknowledge, that such miracles ought to be receiv’d, not as probable only, but as absolutely certain; or, in other words, that the proof from human testimony may be such, as that all the contrary uniform experience, should not only be overbalanced, but, to use the author’s expression, should be annihilated; if such acknowledgments as these, are subversive of his own principles; if by making them, he abandons his darling argument; this strange part the essayist evidently acts.

“I own,” these are his words, “there may
 “possibly be miracles, or violations of the u-
 “fual

" usual course of nature, of such a kind as to
 " admit a proof from human testimony, tho'
 " perhaps" (in this he is modest enough, he
 avers nothing; *perhaps*.) " it will be impos-
 " sible to find any such in all the records of
 " history." To this declaration he subjoins the
 following supposition: " Suppose all authors,
 " in all languages, agree, that from the 1st
 " of January 1600, there was a total dark-
 " ness over the whole earth for eight days;
 " suppose that the tradition of this extraordi-
 " nary event, is still strong and lively among
 " the people; that all travellers, who return
 " from foreign countries, bring us accounts
 " of the same tradition, without the least va-
 " riation or contradiction: 'tis evident, that
 " our present philosophers, instead of doubt-
 " ing of that fact, ought to receive it for cer-
 " tain, and ought to search for the causes,
 " whence it might be deriv'd *."

Could one imagine, that the person who
 had made the above acknowledgment, a per-
 son too who is justly allow'd by all who are
 acquainted with his writings, to possess un-
 common penetration and philosophical abili-
 ties, that this were the same individual, who
 had so short while before affirm'd, that " a
 miracle," or a violation of the usual course

* p. 203. in the note.

of nature, “ supported by any human testimony, is more properly a subject of derision than of argument * ;” who had insisted, that “ it is not requisite, in order to reject the fact, to be able accurately to disprove the testimony, and to trace its falsehood ; that such an evidence carries falsehood on the very face of it † ;” that “ we need but oppose even to a cloud of witnesses, the absolute impossibility, or,” which is all one, “ miraculous nature of the events, which they relate ; that this in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation ‡ ;” and who finally to put an end to all altercation on the subject, had pronounced this *oracle*. “ NO TESTIMONY FOR ANY KIND OF MIRACLE CAN EVER POSSIBLY AMOUNT TO A PROBABILITY, MUCH LESS TO A PROOF §.” Was there ever a more glaring contradiction ?

YET for the event suppos'd by the essayist, the testimony, in his judgment, would amount to a *probability* ; nay to more than a probability, to a *proof* ; let not the reader be astonished, or if he cannot fail to be astonished, let him not be incredulous, when I add, to *more*

* p. 194.
 || p. 202.

† ib.

‡ p. 196. &c.

than a proof, more than a full, entire, and direct proof; for even this I hope to make evident from the author's principles and reasoning. "And even supposing," says he, that is, granting for argument's sake, "that the testimony for a miracle amounted to a proof, 'twould be oppos'd by another proof, deriv'd from the very nature of the fact, which it would endeavour to establish *." Here is then, by his own reasoning, proof against proof, from which there could result no belief or opinion, unless the one is conceiv'd to be in some degree superior to the other. "Of which proofs," says he, "the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force, in proportion to that of its antagonist †." Before the author could believe such a miracle as he supposes, he must at least be satisfied, that the proof of it from testimony is stronger than the proof against it from experience. That we may form an accurate judgment of the strength he here ascribes to testimony, let us consider what, by his own account, is the strength of the opposite proof from experience. "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof

* p. 202.

† p. 180.

“ against a miracle, from the very nature of
 “ the fact, is as *entire*, as any argument from
 “ experience can possibly be imagined *.” Again, “ As an uniform experience amounts
 “ to a proof, there is here a *direct* and *full*
 “ proof, from the nature of the fact, against
 “ the existence of any miracle †.” The proof
 then which the essayist admits from testimony,
 is, by his own estimate, not only superior to
 a *direct* and *full* proof; but even superior to
 as *entire* a proof, as any argument from ex-
 perience can possibly be imagin’d. Whence,
 I pray, doth testimony acquire such amazing
 evidence? ‘ Testimony,’ says the author,
 ‘ hath no evidence, but what it derives from
 ‘ experience. These differ from each other
 ‘ only as the species from the genus.’ Put
 then for *testimony*, the word *experience*, which
 in this case is equivalent, and the conclusion
 will run thus: *Here is a proof from experience,*
which is superior to as entire a proof from ex-
perience, as can possibly be imagin’d. This de-
 duction from the author’s words, the reader
 will perceive, is strictly logical. What the
 meaning of it is, I leave to Mr Hume to ex-
 plain.

What hath been above deduced, how much
 soever it be accounted, is not all that is im-

* p. 180.

† p. 181.

plied in the concession made by the author. He further says, that the miraculous fact so attested, ought not only to be receiv'd, but to be receiv'd *for certain*. Is it not enough, Sir, that you have shown that your most full, most direct, most perfect argument may be overcome; will nothing satisfy you now but its destruction? One would imagine, that you had conjur'd up this demon, by whose irresistible arm you propos'd to give a mortal blow to religion, and render scepticism triumphant, (that you had conjur'd him up, I say) for no other purpose, but to show with what facility you could lay him. To be serious, does not this author remember, that he had oftener than once laid it down as a maxim, That when there is proof against proof, we must incline to the superior, still with a diminution of assurance, in proportion to the force of its antagonist*? But when a fact is received *for certain*, there can be no sensible diminution of assurance, such diminution always implying some doubt and *uncertainty*. Consequently the general proof from experience, tho' as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagin'd, is not only surmounted, but is really in comparison as nothing, or, in Mr Hume's phrase, undergoes annihilation, when balanced with

* p. 178. 180.

the particular proof from testimony. Great indeed, it must be acknowledged, is the force of truth. This conclusion, on the principles I have been endeavouring to establish, has nothing in it, but what is conceivable and just; but on the principles of the essay, which deduce all the force of testimony from experience, serves only to confound the understanding, and to involve the subject in midnight darkness.

'Tis therefore manifest, that either this author's principles condemn his own method of judging, with regard to miraculous facts; or that his method of judging subverts his principles, and is a tacit desertion of them. Thus that impregnable fortress, the asylum of infidelity, which he so lately gloried in having erected, is in a moment abandon'd by him, as a place untenable.

S E C T I O N. IV.

There is no peculiar presumption against such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

IS it then so, that the decisive argument, the essayist flatter'd himself he had discovered *,

vered *, which with the wise and learned, was to prove an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and wou'd consequently be useful, as long as the world endures; is it so, that this boasted argument hath in fact little or no influence on the discoverer himself! But this author may well be excus'd. He cannot be always the metaphysician. He cannot soar incessantly in the clouds. Such constant elevation suits not the lot of humanity. He must sometimes, whether he will or not, descend to a level with other people, and fall into the humble track of common sense. One thing however he is resolv'd on: If he cannot by metaphysic spells silence the most arrogant bigotry and superstition; he will at any rate, though for this purpose he shou'd borrow aid from what he hath no liking to, trite and popular topics; he will at any rate free himself from their impertinent solicitations.

There are accordingly two principles in human nature, by which he accounts for all the relations, that have ever been in the world, concerning miracles. These principles are, the *passion for the marvellous*, and the *religious affection* †; against either of which singly, the

* p. 174.

† p. 184. 185.

philosopher, he says, ought ever to be on his guard ; but incomparably more so, when both happen to be in strict confederacy together. “ For if the spirit of religion join itself to the “ love of wonder, there is an end of common “ sense ; and human testimony in these cir- “ cumstances loses all pretensions to authori- “ ty *.” Notwithstanding this strong affirmation, there is reason to suspect that the author is not in his heart, so great an enemy to the love of wonder, as he affects to appear. No man can make a greater concession in favour of the wonderful, than he hath done in the passage quoted in the preceding section. No man was ever fonder of paradox, and, in theoretical subjects, of every notion that is remote from sentiments universally receiv’d. This love of paradoxes, he owns himself, that both his enemies and his friends reproach him with †. There must surely be some foundation for so universal a censure. If therefore, in respect of the passion for the marvellous, he differ from other people, the difference ariseth from a particular delicacy in this gentleman, which makes him nauseate even to wonder with the crowd. He is of that singular turn that where every body is struck with astonishment, he can see nothing wondrous in the

* p. 185. † Dedication to the four dissertations.

least; at the same time he discovers prodigies, where no soul but himself ever dreamt that there were any.

We may therefore rest assured of it, that the author might be conciliated to the *love of wonder*, provided the *spirit of religion* be kept at a distance, against which he hath unluckily contracted a mortal antipathy, against which he is resolv'd to wage eternal war. When he but touches this subject, he loseth at once his philosophic composure, and speaks with an acrimony unusual to him on other occasions. Something of this kind appears from the citations already made. But if these shou'd not satisfy, I shall produce one or two more, which certainly will. There is a second supposition the author makes, of a miraculous event, in a certain manner circumstanced and attested, which he declares, and I think with particular propriety, that he would "not have the least *inclination* to believe *." At his want of inclination the reader will not be surpris'd, when he learns, that this supposed miracle is concerning a *resurrection*; an event which bears too strong a resemblance both to the doctrine and to the miracles of holy writ, not to alarm a modern Pyrrhonist. To the above declaration he subjoins, "But shou'd

* p. 204. in the note.

"this

“ this miracle be ascrib’d to any new system of
 “ religion, men in all ages have been so much
 “ impos’d on by *ridiculous stories* of that kind,
 “ that this very circumstance would be a full
 “ proof of a cheat, and sufficient with all
 “ men of sense, not only to make them reject
 “ the fact, but even *reject it without further*
 “ *examination.*” Again, a little after, “ As
 “ the violations of truth are more common
 “ in the testimony concerning religious mi-
 “ racles, than in that concerning any other
 “ matter of fact,” (a point in which the author
 is positive, tho’ he neither produceth facts nor
 arguments to support it) “ this must diminish
 “ very much the authority of the former te-
 “ stimony, and” (pray observe his words)
 “ *make us form a GENERAL RESOLUTION,*
 “ *never to lend any attention to it, with what-*
 “ *ever specious pretext it may be cover’d.*”

Never did the passion of an inflamed orator,
 or the intemperate zeal of a religionist, carry
 him further against his adversary, than this
 man of speculation is carried by his prejudice
 against religion. Demagogues and bigots have
 often warn’d the people against listening to the
 arguments of an envied and therefore detest-
 ed rival, lest by his sophistry they should be
 seduced into the most fatal errors. The same
 part this author, a philosopher, a sceptic, a
 dispassionate inquirer after truth, as surely he
 chuseth

chuseth to be accounted, now acts in favour of infidelity. He thinks it not safe to give religion even a hearing. Nay so strange a turn have matters taken of late with the managers of this controversy, that it is now the FREE-THINKER who preaches *implicit faith*; 'tis the INFIDEL, who warns us of the danger of consulting *reason*. Beware, says he, I admonish you, of inquiring into the strength of the plea, or of bringing it to the deceitful test of reason; for "those who will be so SILLY
 " as to examine the affair by that medium,
 " and seek particular flaws in the *testimony*,
 " are almost sure to be confounded *." That religion is concern'd in the matter, is reckon'd by these sages sufficient evidence of imposture. The proofs she offers in her own defence, we are told by these candid judges, ought to be rejected, and *rejected without examination*. The old way of scrutiny and argument must now be laid aside, having been at length discover'd to be but a bungling, a tedious, and a dangerous way at best. What then shall we substitute in its place? The essayist hath a most admirable expedient. A shorter and surer method he recommends to us, the expeditious way of *resolution*. 'Form,' says he, 'a GENERAL RESOLUTION, never to lend any at-

* p. 197. in the note.

'tention to testimonies or facts urged by religion, with whatever specious pretext they may be cover'd.'

I had almost congratulated Mr Hume, and our enlighten'd age, on this happy invention, before I reflected, that tho' the application might be new, the expedient itself, of resolving to be deaf to argument, was very ancient, having been often with great success employ'd against atheists and heretics, and warmly recommended by Bellarmine and Scotus, and most others of that bright fraternity the schoolmen: Persons, I acknowledge, to whom one could not, perhaps in any other instance, find a resemblance in my ingenious opponent.

I'm afraid that after such a declaration, I must not presume to consider myself as arguing with the author, who hath, in so peremptory a manner, resolv'd to attend to nothing that can be said in opposition to his theory. *'What judgment he has,'* to use his own expression, *'he has renounced by principle, in these sublime and mysterious subjects *.'* If however it should prove the fate of these papers, the forbidding title of them notwithstanding, to be at any time honour'd with the perusal of some infidel, not indeed so rivetted

* p. 185.

in unbelief as the essayist, I would earnestly intreat such reader, in the solemn style of Mr Hume, "To lay his hand upon his heart, and "after serious consideration declare *," If any of the patrons of religion had acted this part, and warn'd people not to try by *argument* the metaphysical subtleties of the adversaries, affirming, that 'they who were MAD enough to examine the affair by that medium, and seek particular flaws in the *reasoning*, were almost sure to be confounded; that 'the only prudent method was, to form a GENERAL RESOLUTION, never to lend any attention to what was advanced on the opposite side, *however specious*;' whether this conduct would not have afforded great matter of triumph to those gentlemen the deists; whether it would not have been constru'd by them, and even justly, into a tacit conviction of the weakness of our cause, which we were afraid of exposing in the light, and bringing to a fair trial. But we scorn to take shelter in obscurity, and meanly to decline the combat; confident as we are, that REASON is our ally and our friend, and glad to find that the enemy at length so violently suspects her.

* p. 206.

As to the first method, by which the author accounts for the fabulous relations of monsters and prodigies, 'tis freely acknowledged, that the creator hath implanted in human nature, as a spur to the improvement of the understanding, a principle of *curiosity*, which makes the mind feel a particular pleasure in every new acquisition of knowledge. 'Tis acknowledged also, that as every principle in our nature is liable to abuse, so this principle will often give the mind a bias to the marvellous, for the more marvellous any thing is, that is, the more unlike to all that hath formerly been known, the more new it is; and this bias, in many instances, may induce belief on insufficient evidence.

But the presumption that hence ariseth against the marvellous is not stronger in the case of miracles (as will appear from an attentive perusal of the second section) than in the case of every fact that is perfectly extraordinary. Yet how easily this obstacle may be overcome by testimony, might be illustrated, if necessary, in almost every branch of science, in physiology, in geography, in history. On the contrary, what an immense impediment would this presumption prove to the progress of philosophy and letters, had it in reality one fiftieth part of the strength, which the author seems to attribute to it. I shall not tire my
reader

reader or myself by recurring to the philosophic wonders in electricity, chymistry, magnetism, which, all the world sees, may be fully prov'd to us by testimony, before we make the experiments ourselves.

BUT there is, it seems, additional to this, a peculiar presumption against religious miracles. "The wise," as the author hath observ'd with reason, "lend a very academic faith to every report, which favours the passion of the reporter, whether it magnifies his country, his family, or himself, or in any other way strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities *." Now, as no object whatever operates more powerfully on the fancy than *religion* does, or works up the passions to a higher fervour; so, in matters relating to this subject, if in any subject, we have reason to suspect that the understanding will prove a dupe to the passions. On this point therefore we ought to be peculiarly cautious, that we be not hasty of belief. In this sentiment we all agree.

But there is one circumstance, which he hath overlook'd, and which is nevertheless of the greatest consequence in the debate. It is this, that the prejudice resulting from the reli-

* p. 200.

gious affection, may just as readily *obstruct*, as *promote* our faith in a religious miracle. What things in nature are more contrary, than one religion is to another religion? They are just as contrary as light and darkness, truth and error. The affections, with which they are contemplated by the same person, are just as opposite, as desire and aversion, love and hatred. The same religious zeal which gives the mind of a Christian, a *propensity* to the belief of a miracle in support of Christianity, will inspire him with an *aversion* from the belief of a miracle in support of Mahometism. The same principle, which will make him acquiesce in evidence *less* than sufficient in the one case; will make him require evidence *more* than sufficient in the other.

Before then the remark of the author can be of any use in directing our judgment, as to the evidence of miracles attested, we must consider whether the original tenets of the witnesses would naturally have biased their minds in *favour* of the miracles, or in *opposition* to them. If the former was the case, the testimony is so much the *less* to be regarded; if the latter, so much the *more*. Will it satisfy on this head to acquaint us, that the prejudices of the witnesses must have favour'd the miracles, since they were zealous promoters of the doctrine, in support of which those miracles are said to have

have been perform'd ? To answer thus wou'd be to misunderstand the point. The question is, Was this doctrine the faith of the witnesses, before they saw, or fancied they saw the miracles ? If it was, I agree with him. Great, very great allowance must be made for the prejudices of education, for principles, early perhaps, carefully, and deeply rooted in their minds, and for the religious affection founded in these principles ; which allowance must always derogate from the weight of their testimony. But if the faith of the witnesses stood originally in opposition to the doctrine attested by the miracles ; if the only account that can be given of their conversion, is the conviction which the miracles produced in them ; it must be a preposterous way of arguing, to derive their conviction from a religious zeal, which would at first obstinately withstand, and for some time hinder such conviction. On the contrary, that the evidence arising from miracles perform'd in proof of a doctrine disbeliev'd, and consequently hated before, did in fact surmount that obstacle, and conquer all the opposition arising thence, is a very strong presumption in favour of that evidence : just as strong a presumption in its favour, as it would have been against it, had all their former zeal, and principles, and prejudices,

judices, co-operated with the evidence, whatever it was, in gaining an entire assent.

Hence there is the greatest disparity in this respect, a disparity which deserves to be particularly attended to, betwixt the evidence of miracles perform'd in proof of a religion *to be* establish'd, and in *contradiction* to opinions generally receiv'd ; and the evidence of miracles perform'd in support of a religion *already* establish'd, and in *confirmation* of opinions generally receiv'd. Hence also the greatest disparity betwixt the miracles recorded by the evangelists, and those related by Mariana, Bede, or any monkish historian.

THERE is then no peculiar presumption against religious miracles merely as such ; if in certain circumstances there is a presumption against them, the presumption ariseth solely from the circumstances, insomuch that, in the opposite circumstances, it is as strongly in their favour.

SECT.

SECTION V.

There is a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

IN this section I propose to consider the reverse of the question treated in the former. In the former I prov'd that there is no peculiar presumption against religious miracles; I now inquire whether there be any in their favour. The question is important, and intimately connected with the subject.

THE boldest infidel will not deny, that the immortality of the soul, a future and eternal state, and the connection of our happiness or misery in that state, with our present good or bad conduct, not to mention the doctrines concerning the divine unity and perfections, are tenets which carry no absurdity in them. They may be true for aught he knows. He disbelieves them, not because they are incredible in themselves, but because he hath not evidence of their truth. He pretends not to disprove them, nor does he think the task incumbent on him. He only pleads, that be-
fore

fore he can yield them his assent, they must be prov'd.

Now, as whatever is possible, may be suppos'd, let us suppose that the dogmas above mentioned are all infallible truths; and let the unbeliever say, whether he can conceive an object worthier of the divine interposál, than to reveal these truths to mankind; and to enforce them in such a manner, as may give them a suitable influence on the heart and life. Of all the inhabitants of the earth, man is incomparably the noblest. Whatever therefore regards the interest of the human species, is a grander concern, than what regards either the inanimate or the brute creation. If man was made, as is doubtless not impossible, for an after state of immortality; whatever relates to that immortal state, or may conduce to prepare him for the fruition of it, must be immensely superior to that which concerns merely the transient enjoyments of the present life. How sublime then is the object which religion, and religion only, exhibits as the ground of supernatural interpositions! This object is no other than the interest of man, a reasonable and moral agent, the only being in this lower world which bears in his soul the image of his maker; not the interest of an individual, but of the kind; not for a limited duration, but
for

for eternity : an object at least in one respect adequate to the majesty of God.

Does this appear to the essayist too much like arguing *a priori*, of which I know he hath a detestation ? It is just such an argument, as, presupposing the most rational principles of Deism, results from those maxims concerning intelligent causes, and their operations, which are founded in general experience, and which uniformly lead us to expect, that the end will be proportionate to the means. The *Pagans* of Rome had notions of their divinities infinitely inferior to the opinions concerning God, which in Christian countries are maintain'd even by those, who, for distinction's sake, are called DEISTS. Yet such of the former as had any justness of taste, were offended with those poets, who exhibited the celestials on slight occasions, and for trivial purposes, interfering in the affairs of men. Why ? Because such an exhibition shock'd all the principles of probability. It had not that verisimilitude which is absolutely necessary to render fiction agreeable. Accordingly it is a precept, with relation to the machinery of the drama, given by one who was both a critic and a poet, *That a god must never be introduced, unless to accomplish some important design, which*
could

could not be otherwise effectuated *. The foundation of this rule, which is that of my argument, is therefore one of those indisputable principles, which are found every where, among the earliest results of experience.

THUS it appears, that from the dignity of the end, there ariseth a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles, as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

SECTION VI.

Inquiry into the meaning and propriety of one of Mr Hume's favourite maxims.

THERE is a method truly curious, suggested by the author, for extricating the mind, should the evidence from testimony be so great, that its falsehood might, as he terms it, be accounted miraculous. In this puzzling case, when a man is so beset with miracles, that he is under a necessity of admitting one, he must always take care it be the smallest; for it is an *axiom* in this writer's DIALECTIC, That *the probability of the fact is in the inverse ratio of the quantity of miracle*

* Nec deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.

HORAT.

there

there is in it. "I weigh," says he, "the
 "one miracle against the other, and accor-
 "ding to the superiority which I discover, I
 "pronounce my decision, and always reject
 "the greater miracle *."

Now, of this method, which will no doubt
 be thought by many to be very ingenious,
 and which appears to the essayist both very
 momentous and very perspicuous, I own, I
 am not able to discover either the reasonable-
 ness or the use.

First, I cannot see the reasonableness. 'A
 'miracle,' to adopt his own definition, 'im-
 'plies the transgression,' or rather the suspen-
 sion, 'of some law of nature; and that ei-
 'ther by a particular volition of the Deity,
 'or by the interposal of some invisible agent †.'
 Now, as I should think, from the principles
 laid down in the preceding section, that it
 would be for no trifling purpose, that the
 laws of nature would be suspended, and ei-
 ther the Deity or an invisible agent would
 interpose; 'tis on the same principles, natu-
 ral to imagine, that the means, or miracle
 perform'd, should bear a proportion, in re-
 spect of dignity and greatness, to the end pro-
 pos'd. Were I therefore under such a neces-

* p. 182.

† Ib. in the note.

sity as is suppos'd by Mr Hume, of admitting the truth of a miracle, I acknowledge, that of two contradictory miracles, where all other circumstances are equal, I should think it reasonable to believe the greater. I shall borrow an illustration from the author himself. "A miracle," he says, "may either be *discoverable* by men or not. This alters not its nature and essence. The raising of a house or ship into the air is a visible miracle; the raising of a feather, when the wind wants *ever so little* of a force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle, tho' not so *sensible* with regard to us *." Surely if any miracle may be called *little*, the last mentioned is intitled to that denomination, not only because it is an *undiscoverable* and *insensible* miracle, but because the quantum of miraculous force requisite, is, by the hypothesis, *ever so little*, or the least conceivable. Yet if it were certain, that God, angel, or spirit, were, for one of those purposes, to interpose in suspending the laws of nature; I believe most men would join with me in thinking, that it wou'd be rather for the raising of a *house* or *ship*, than for the raising of a *feather*.

But though the maxim laid down by the

* p. 182. in the note.

author were just, I cannot discover in what instance, or by what application, it can be render'd of any utility. Why? Because we have no rule, whereby we can judge of the greatness of miracles. I allow, that in such a singular instance, as that above quoted from the essay, we may judge safely enough. But that can be of no practical use. In almost every case that will occur, I may warrantably aver, that it will be impossible for the acutest intellect to decide, which of two is the greater miracle. As to the author, I cannot find that he has favour'd us with any light, in so important and so critical a question. Have we not then some reason to dread, that the task will not be less difficult to furnish us with a *measure*, by which we can determine the magnitude of miracles; than to provide us with a *balance*, by which we can ascertain the comparative weight of testimonies and experiences?

If, leaving the speculations of the essayist, we shall, in order to be assisted on this subject, recur to his example and decisions; let us consider the miracle which was recited in the third section, and which he declares, would, on the evidence of such testimony as he supposes, not only be probable, but certain. For my part, 'tis not in my power to conceive a greater miracle than that

is. The whole universe is affected by it ; the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars. The most invariable laws of nature with which we are acquainted, even those which regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, and dispense darkness and light to worlds, are violated. I appeal to the author himself, whether it could be called a greater, or even so great a miracle, that all the writers at that time, or even all mankind, had been seiz'd with a new species of epidemical delirium, which had given rise to this strange illusion. But in this the author is remarkably unfortunate, that the principles by which he in fact regulates his judgment and belief, are often the reverse of those which he endeavours to establish in his theory.

SHALL I hazard a conjecture ? It is, that the word *miracle*, as thus us'd by the author, is us'd in a vague and improper sense, as a synonymous term for *improbable* ; and that believing the *less*, and rejecting the *greater miracle*, denote simply believing what is *least*, and rejecting what is *most improbable* ; or still more explicitly, believing what we think *most worthy of belief*, and rejecting what we think *least worthy*. I am aware, on a second perusal of the author's words, that my talent in guessing may be justly question'd. He hath in effect told us himself what he means.

“ When

"When any one," says he, "tells me, that
 "he saw a dead man restor'd to life, I imme-
 "diately consider with myself, whether it be
 "more *probable*, that this person should ei-
 "ther deceive or be deceiv'd, or that the fact
 "he relates, should really have happen'd.
 "I weigh the one *miracle* against the other ;
 "and according to the superiority which I
 "discover, I pronounce my decision, and al-
 "ways reject the greater miracle. If the false-
 "hood of his testimony would be more mira-
 "culous than the event which he relates ;
 "then, and not till then, can he pretend to
 "command my belief or opinion *." At first
 indeed one is ready to exclaim, What a strange
revolution is here ! The belief of miracles
 then, even by Mr Hume's account, is abso-
 lutely inevitable. Miracles themselves too,
 so far from being impossible, or even extraor-
 dinary, are the commonest things in nature ;
 so common, that when any miraculous fact is
 attested to us, we are equally under a necessity
 of believing a miracle, whether we believe
 the fact, or deny it. The whole difference
 between the essayist and us, is at length redu-
 ced to this single point, Whether greater or
 smaller miracles are intitled to the prefer-
 ence. This mystery however vanishes on a

* p. 182.

nearer inspection. The style, we find, is figurative, and the author is all the while amusing both his readers and himself with an unusual application of a familiar term. What is call'd the weighing of *probabilities* in one sentence, is the weighing of *miracles* in the next. If it were ask'd, For what reason did not Mr Hume express his sentiment in ordinary and proper words? I could only answer, I know no reason but one, and that is, To give the appearance of novelty and depth to one of those very harmless propositions, which by philosophers are called *identical*, and which, to say the truth, need some disguise, to make them pass upon the world with tolerable decency.

What then shall be said of the conclusion which he gives as the sum and quintessence of the first part of the essay? The best thing, for aught I know, that can be said, is, that it contains a most certain truth, tho' at the same time the least significant, that ever perhaps was usher'd into the world with so much solemnity. In order therefore to make *plain-er English* of his *plain consequence*, let us only change the word *miraculous*, as apply'd to the falsehood of human testimony, into *improbable*, which in this passage is entirely equivalent, and observe the effect produced by this elucidation. "The plain consequence
" is,

“ is, and 'tis a GENERAL MAXIM, *worthy of*
“ *our attention*, That NO TESTIMONY IS
“ SUFFICIENT TO ESTABLISH A MIRACLE;
“ UNLESS THE TESTIMONY BE OF SUCH
“ A KIND, THAT ITS FALSEHOOD WOULD
“ BE MORE IMPROBABLE, THAN
“ THE FACT WHICH IT ENDEAVOURS
“ TO ESTABLISH *.” If the reader thinks
himself instructed by this discovery, I should
be loth to envy him the pleasure he may de-
rive from it.

* p. 182.

A

A
DISSERTATION
ON
MIRACLES.

PART II.

The miracles on which the belief of Christianity is founded, are sufficiently attested.

SECTION I.

There is no presumption, arising from human nature, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

FROM what hath been evinced in the fourth and fifth sections of the former part, with regard to religion in general, *two corollaries* are clearly deducible
in

in favour of Christianity. *One* is, That the presumption arising from the dignity of the end, to say the least of it, can in no religion be pleaded with greater advantage, than in the Christian. *The other* is, That the presumption arising from the religious affection, instead of weakening, corroborates the evidence of the gospel. The faith of Jesus was promulgated, and gained ground, not with the assistance, but in defiance, of all the religious zeal and prejudices of the times.

IN order to invalidate the *second* corollary, it will possibly be urged, that proselytes to a new religion, may be gain'd at first; either by address and eloquence, or by the appearances of uncommon sanctity, and rapturous fervours of devotion; that if once people have commenced proselytes, the transition to enthusiasm is almost unavoidable; and that enthusiasm will fully account for the utmost pitch both of credulity and falseness.

Admitting that a few converts might be made by the aforesaid arts, it is subversive of all the laws of probability, to imagine, that the strongest prepossessions, fortified with that vehement abhorrence which contradiction in religious principles rarely fails to excite, should be so easily vanquish'd in multitudes. Besides, the very pretext of supporting the doctrine by
miracles,

miracles, if a false pretext, would of necessity do unspeakable hurt to the cause. The pretence of miracles will quickly attract the attention of all to whom the new doctrine is published. The influence which address and eloquence, appearances of sanctity and fervours of devotion, would otherwise have had, however great, will be superseded by the consideration of what is infinitely more striking and decisive. The miracles will therefore first be canvassed, and canvassed with a temper of mind the most unfavourable to conviction. 'Tis not solely on the testimony of the evangelists that Christians believe the gospel, tho' that testimony appears in all respects such as merits the highest regard; but it is on the success of the gospel; it is on the testimony, as we may justly call it, of the numberless proselytes that were daily made to a religion, opposing all the religious professions then in the world, and appealing, for the satisfaction of every body, to the visible and miraculous interposition of Heaven in its favour. The witnesses consider'd in this light, and in this light they ought to be consider'd, will be found more than 'a sufficient number:' and tho' perhaps there were few of them, what the author would denominate 'men of education and learning;' yet, which is more essential, they were generally men of good sense, and

and knowledge enough to secure them against all delusion, as to those plain facts for which they gave their testimony; men who (in the common acceptation of the words) neither did, nor could derive to themselves either interest or honour by their attestations, but did thereby, on the contrary, evidently abandon all hopes of both.

It deserves also to be remember'd, that there is here no contradictory testimony, notwithstanding that both the founder of our religion and his adherents were from the first surrounded by inveterate enemies, who never 'esteem'd the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention or regard;' and who, as they could not want the means, gave evident proofs that they wanted not the inclination to detect the fraud, if there had been any fraud to be detected. They were jealous of their own reputation and authority, and foresaw but too clearly, that the success of Jesus would give a fatal blow to both. As to the testimonies themselves, we may permit the author to try them by his own rules *. There is here no opposition of testimony; there is no apparent ground of suspicion from the character of the witnesses; there is no interest which they could have in imposing on the

* p. 178.

world ; there is not a small number of witnesses, they are innumerable. Do the historians of our Lord deliver their testimony with doubt and hesitation ? Do they fall into the opposite extreme of using too violent asseverations ? So far from both, that the most amazing instances of divine power, and the most interesting events, are related without any censure or reflection of the writers on persons, parties, actions, or opinions ; with such an unparallel'd and unaffected simplicity, as demonstrates, that they were neither themselves animated by passion like enthusiasts, nor had any design of working on the passions of their readers. The greatest miracles are recorded, with as little appearance either of doubt or wonder in the writer, and with as little suspicion of the reader's incredulity, as the most ordinary incidents : A manner as unlike that of impostors as of enthusiasts ; a manner in which those writers are altogether singular ; and I will add, a manner which can on no supposition be tolerably accounted for, but that of the truth, and not of the truth only, but of the notoriety, of the events which they related. They spoke like people, who had themselves been long familiariz'd to such acts of omnipotence and grace. They spoke like people, who knew, that many of the most marvellous actions they related, had been so publicly

publicly perform'd, and in the presence of multitudes alive at the time of their writing, as to be uncontrovertible, and as in fact not to have been controverted, even by their bitterest foes. They could boldly appeal on this head to their enemies. *A man, say they, speaking of their master *, approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as YE YOURSELVES ALSO KNOW.* The objections of Christ's persecutors against his doctrine, those objections also which regard the nature of his miracles, are, together with his answers, faithfully recorded by the sacred historians; 'tis strange, if the occasion had been given, that we have not the remotest hint of any objections against the reality of his miracles, and a confutation of those objections.

BUT passing the manner in which the first proselytes may be gain'd to a new religion, and supposing some actually gain'd, no matter how, to the faith of Jesus; can it be easily accounted for, that, even with the help of those early converts, this religion should have been propagated in the world, on the *false* pretence of miracles? Nothing more easily, says the author. Those original propagators of the

* Acts ii. 22.

gospel have been deceiv'd themselves; for "a
 " religionist may be an *enthusiast*, and imagine
 " he sees what has no reality *."

Were this admitted, it would not, in the
 present case, remove the difficulty. He must
 not only himself imagine he sees what has no
 reality, he must make every body present,
 those who are no enthusiasts, nor even friends,
 nay he must make enemies also, imagine they
 see the same thing which he imagines he sees;
 for the miracles of Jesus were acknowledged
 by those who persecuted him.

That an *enthusiast* is very liable to be im-
 pos'd on, in whatever favours the particular
 species of enthusiasm, with which he is affect-
 ed, none, who knows any thing of the human
 heart, will deny. But still this frailty hath its
 limits. For my own part, I cannot find ex-
 amples of any, even among enthusiasts, (un-
 less to the conviction of every body they were
 distracted) who did not see and hear in the
 same manner as other people. Many of this
 tribe have mistaken the reveries of a heated i-
 magination, for the communications of the
 Divine Spirit, who never, in one single in-
 stance, mistook the operations of their exter-
 nal senses. Without marking this difference,
 we should make no distinction between the en-

thusiastic character and the *frantic*, which are in themselves evidently distinct. How shall we then account from *enthusiasm*, for the testimony given by the apostles, concerning the resurrection of their master, and his ascension into heaven, not to mention innumerable other facts? In these it was impossible that any, who in the use of their reason were but one remove from *Bedlamites*, should have been deceiv'd. Yet, in the present case, the unbeliever must even say more than this, and, accumulating absurdity upon absurdity, must affirm, that the apostles were deceiv'd as to the resurrection and ascension of their master, notwithstanding that they themselves had concerted the plan of stealing his body, and concealing it.

BUT this is not the only resource of the infidel. If he is driven from this strong hold, he can take refuge in another. Admit the apostles were not deceiv'd themselves, they may nevertheless have been, thro' mere devotion and benevolence, incited to deceive the rest of mankind. The religionist, rejoins the author, "may know his narration to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so highly a cause *."

* p. 185.

Our religion, to use its own nervous language, teacheth us *, that we ought not to lie, or *speake wickedly*, not even for God; that we ought not to *accept his person* in judgment, or *talk*, or *act deceitfully for him*. But so very little, it must be owned, has this sentiment been attended to, even in the Christian world, that one would almost think, it contain'd a strain of virtue too sublime for the apprehension of the multitude. 'Tis therefore a fact not to be question'd, that little pious frauds, as they are absurdly, not to say impiously, call'd, have been often practis'd by ignorant zealots, in support of a cause, which they firmly believ'd to be both true and holy. But in all such cases the truth and holiness of the cause are wholly independent of those artifices. A person may be perswaded of the former, who is too clear-sighted to be deceiv'd by the latter : for even a full conviction of the truth of the cause is not, in the least, inconsistent with either the consciousness, or the detection of the frauds us'd in support of it. In the Romish church, for example, there are many zealous and orthodox believers, who are nevertheless incapable of being impos'd on by the lying wonders, which some of their clergy have exhibited. The circumstances of the a-

* Job. xiii. 7. 8.

postles were widely different from the circumstances, either of those believers, or of their clergy. Some of the miraculous events which the apostles attested, were not only the *evidences*, but the distinguishing *doctrines* of the religion which they taught. There is therefore in their case an absolute inconsistency betwixt a conviction of the truth of the cause, and the consciousness of the frauds us'd in support of it. Those frauds themselves, if I may so express myself, constituted the very essence of the cause. What were the tenets, by which they were distinguish'd, in their religious system, particularly from the Pharisees, who own'd not only the unity and perfections of the Godhead, the existence of angels and demons, but the general resurrection, and a future state of rewards and punishments? Were not these their peculiar tenets, That ' Jesus, ' whom the Jews and Romans join'd in crucify- ' ing without the gates of Jerusalem, had suf- ' fer'd that ignominious death, to make a- ' tonement for the sins of men *? that, in te- ' stimony of this, and of the divine acceptance, ' God had rais'd him from the dead? that he ' had exalted him to his own right hand, to ' be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance ' to the people, and the remission of their

* Rom. v. 6. &c.

‘fins * ? that he is now our advocate with the
 ‘father † ? that he will descend from heaven
 ‘at the last day, to judge the world in righte-
 ‘ousness ‡, and to receive his faithful disciples
 ‘into heaven, to be forever with himself || ?’
 These fundamental articles of their system,
 they must have known, deserv’d no better ap-
 pellation than a string of lies, if we suppose
 them liars in the testimony they gave of the
 resurrection and ascension of their master. If,
 agreeably to the Jewish hypothesis, they had,
 in a most wonderful and daring manner, stole
 by night the corpse from the sepulchre, that
 on the false report of his resurrection, they
 might found the stupendous fabric they had
 projected among themselves, how was it pos-
 sible they should conceive the cause to be ei-
 ther true or holy ? They must have known,
 that in those cardinal points, on which all de-
 pends, they were false witnesses concerning
 God, wilful corrupters of the religion of their
 country, and public, though indeed disinter-
 ested incendiaries, whithersoever they went.
 They could not therefore enjoy even that
 poor solace, ‘that the end will sanctify the
 ‘means ;’ a solace with which the monk or
 anchoret silences the remonstrances of his con-

* Acts ii. 32. &c. v. 30. &c. x. 40. &c. † 1 Jo.
 ii. 1. ‡ Acts x. 42. xvii. 31. || Jo. xiv. 3.

science, when, in defence of a religion which he regards as certain, he, by some pitiful juggler-trick, imposeth on the credulity of the rabble. On the contrary, the whole scheme of the apostles must have been, and not only must have been, but must have appear'd to themselves, a most audacious freedom with their maker, a villainous imposition on the world, and I will add, a most foolish and ridiculous project of heaping ruin and disgrace upon themselves, without the prospect of any compensation in the present life, or reversion in the future.

ONCE more, can we account for so extraordinary a phenomenon, by attributing it to that most powerful of all motives, as the author thinks it *, "an ambition to attain so sublime a character, as that of a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador from heaven?"

Not to mention, that such a towering ambition was but ill adapted to the mean rank, poor education, and habitual circumstances, of such men as the apostles mostly had been; a desire of that kind, whatever wonders it may effectuate, when supported by enthusiasm, and faith, and zeal, must have soon been crush'd by the outward, and to human appearance in-

* p. 200.

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surmountable

surmountable difficulties and distresses they had to encounter; when quite unsupported from within by either faith, or hope, or the testimony of a good conscience; rather I should have said, when they themselves were haunted from within by a consciousness of the blackest guilt, impiety, and baseness. Strange indeed it must be own'd without a parallel, that in such a cause, and in such circumstances, not only one, but all, should have the resolution to persevere to the last, in spite of infamy and torture; and that no one among so many confederates, should be induced to betray the dreadful secret.

THUS it appears, that no *address* in the FOUNDER of our religion, that no *enthusiastic credulity*, no *pious frauds*, no *ambitious views*, in the FIRST CONVERTS, will account for its propagation on the plea of miracles, if false; and that consequently there is no presumption arising from *human nature* against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

S E C T I O N. II.

There is no presumption arising from the history of mankind, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

IN the foregoing section, I reason'd only from the knowledge that experience affords us of *human nature*, and of the motives by which men are influenced in their conduct. I come now to the examination of facts, that I may know whether the *history of mankind* will invalidate or corroborate my reasonings.

THE essayist is confident, that all the evidence resulting hence is on his side. Nay so unquestionable a truth does this appear to him, that he never attempts to prove it : he always presupposeth it, as a point universally acknowledged. ‘ Men in all ages,’ we learn from a passage already quoted, ‘ have been ‘ much impos’d on, by ridiculous stories of ‘ miracles ascrib’d to new systems of religion *.’ Again he asserts, that “ the violations of “ truth are more common in the testimony “ concerning religious miracles, than in that

* p. 204. in the note.

“ concerning

“concerning any other matter of fact *.” These assertions however, tho’ us’d for the same purpose, the attentive reader will observe, are far from conveying the same sense, or being of equal weight in the argument. The difference hath been marked in the fourth section of the first part of this tract. The oracular predictions among the ancient Pagans, and the pretended wonders perform’d by capuchins and friars, by itinerant or stationary teachers among the Roman Catholics, the author will doubtless reckon among religious miracles; but he can with no propriety denominate them, miracles ascrib’d to a new system of religion †. Now ’tis with those of
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* p. 205. in the note.

† Should the author insist, that such miracles are nevertheless meant to establish, if not a new system, at least some *new point* of religion; that those which are wrought in Spain, for example, are not intended as proofs of the gospel, but as proofs of the efficacy of a particular *crucifix*, or *relic*; which is always a new point, or at least not universally receiv’d: I must beg the reader will consider, what is the meaning of this expression, *a new point of religion*. It is not *a new system*, ’tis not even *a new doctrine*. We know, that one article of faith in the church of Rome is, that the images and relics of saints ought to be worshipp’d. We know also, that in proof of
this

the class last mentioned, and with those only, that I am concerned ; for 'tis only to them that the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity bear any analogy.

I shall then examine impartially this bold assertion, That ' men in all ages have been ' much impos'd on, by ridiculous stories of ' miracles ascrib'd to new systems of religion.' For my part, I am fully satisfied, that there is not the shadow of truth in it : and I am utterly at a loss to conceive what could induce an author so well vers'd in the annals both of ancient and modern times as Mr Hume, in such a positive manner to advance it. I be-

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this article, 'tis one of their principal arguments, that miracles are wrought by means of such relics and images. We know further, that that church never attempted to enumerate her relics and other trumpery, and thus to ascertain the individual objects of the adoration of her votaries. The producing therefore a *new relic, image, or crucifix*, as an object of worship, implies not the smallest *deviation* from the *faith establish'd* ; at the same time the opinion, that *miracles* are perform'd by means of such relic, image, or crucifix, proves, in the minds of the people, for the reason assign'd, a very strong *confirmation* of the *faith establish'd*. All such miracles therefore must be consider'd, as wrought in support of the receiv'd superstition, and accordingly are always favour'd by the popular prejudices.

lieve

lieve it will require no elaborate disquisition to evince, that these two, JUDAISM and CHRISTIANITY, are of all that have subsisted, or now subsist in the world, the only religions, which claim to have been attended in their first publication with the evidence of *miracles*. It deserves also to be remarked, that it is more in conformity to common language, and incidental distinctions which have arisen, than to strict propriety, that I call Judaism and Christianity, two religions. 'Tis true, the Jewish creed, in the days of our Saviour, having been corrupted by rabbinical traditions, stood in many respects, and at this day stands, in direct opposition to the gospel. But it is not in this acceptance that I use the word Judaism. Such a creed, I am sensible, we can no more denominate the doctrine of the *Old Testament*, than we can denominate the creed of Pope Pius the doctrine of the *New*. And truly the fate which both institutions, that of *Moses*, and that of *Christ*, have met with among men, hath been in many respects extremely similar. But when, on the contrary, we consider the religion of the Jews, not as the system of faith and practice, which presently obtains, or heretofore hath obtain'd among that people ; but solely as the religion that is revealed in *the law and the prophets*, we must acknowledge, that in this institution are contained

contained the rudiments of the gospel. The same great plan carried on by the divine providence, for the recovery and final happiness of mankind, is the subject of both dispensations. They are by consequence closely connected. In the former we are acquainted with the *occasion* and *rise*, in the latter more fully with the *progress* and *completion* of this benign scheme. 'Tis for this reason that the scriptures of the *Old Testament*, which alone contain the authentic religion of the SYNAGOGUE, have ever been acknowledged in the CHURCH, an essential part of the *gospel-revelation*. The apostles and evangelists, in every part of their writings, presuppose the truth of the Mosaic economy, and often found both their doctrine and arguments upon it. 'Tis therefore, I affirm, only in proof of this one series of revelations, that the aid of miracles hath with success been pretended to.

CAN the PAGAN religion, can, I should rather say, any of the numberless religions (for they are totally distinct) known by the common name of *Pagan*, produce any claim of this kind that will merit our attention? If the author knows of any, I wish he had mention'd it; for in all antiquity, as far as my acquaintance with it reacheth, I can recollect no such claim. However, that I may

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not,

not, on the one hand, appear to pass the matter too slightly; or, on the other, lose myself, as Mr Hume expresses it, in too wide a field; I shall briefly consider, whether the ancient religions of *Greece* or *Rome* (which of all the species of Heathenish superstition are on many accounts the most remarkable) can present a claim of this nature. Will it be said, that that monstrous heap of fables we find in ancient bards, relating to the genealogy, production, amours and achievements, of the gods, are the miracles on which Greek and Roman Paganism claims to be founded?

If one should talk in this manner, I must remind him, *first*, that these are by no means exhibited as EVIDENCES, but as the THEOLOGY itself; the poets always using the same affirmative style concerning what passed in heaven, in hell, and in the ocean, where men could not be spectators, as concerning what passed upon the earth; *secondly*, that all those mythological tales are confessedly recorded many centuries after they are supposed to have happened; no voucher, no testimony, nothing that can deserve the name of evidence having been produced, or even alleged, in proof of them; *thirdly*, that the intention of the writers seems to be solely the amusement, not the conviction of their readers; that accordingly no writer scruples to
model

model the mythology to his particular taste, or rather caprice; but considering this as a province subject to the laws of Parnassus, all agree in arrogating here the immemorial privilege of poets, to say and feign, unquestion'd, what they please; and *fourthly*, that at least several of their narrations are allegorical, and as plainly intended to convey some physical or moral instruction, as any of the apologues of Æsop. But to have said even thus much in refutation of so absurd a plea, will perhaps to many readers appear superfluous.

LEAVING therefore the endless absurdities and incoherent fictions of idolaters, I shall inquire, in the next place, whether the MAHOMETAN worship (which in its speculative principles appears more rational) pretends to have been built on the evidence of miracles.

Mahomet, the founder of this profession, openly and frequently, as all the world knows, disclaim'd such evidence. He frankly own'd, that he had no commission nor power to work miracles, being sent of God to the people only as a preacher. Not indeed but that there are things mentioned in the revelation he pretended to give them, which, if true, would have been miraculous; such are the nocturnal visits of the angel Gabriel, (not unlike those secret interviews, which Numa, the institutor

of the Roman rites, affirm'd that he had with the goddess Egeria) his getting from time to time parcels of the uncreated book transmitted to him from heaven, and his most amazing night-journey. But these miracles could be no evidences of his mission. Why? Because no person was witness to them. On the contrary, it was because his adherents had previously and implicitly believ'd his apostleship, that they admitted things so incredible, on his bare declaration. There is indeed one miracle, and but one, which he often urgeth against the infidels, as the main support of his cause; a miracle, for which even we, in this distant region and period, have not only the evidence of testimony, but, if we please to use it, all the evidence which the contemporaries and countrymen of this military apostle ever enjoy'd. The miracle I mean is the manifest divinity, or supernatural excellence, of the scriptures which he gave them; a miracle, concerning which I shall only say, that as it falls not under the cognisance of the senses, but of a much more fallible tribunal, taste in composition, and critical discernment, so a principle of less efficacy than enthusiasm, even the slightest partiality, may make a man, in this particular, imagine he perceives what hath no reality. Certain it is, that notwithstanding the many defiances, which the prophet gave his enemies,

sometimes

sometimes to produce ten chapters, sometimes one, that could bear to be compar'd with an equal portion of the perspicuous book *, they seem not in the least to have been convinced, that there was any thing miraculous in the matter. Nay this sublime performance, so highly venerated by every Mussulman, they were not afraid to blaspheme as contemptible, calling it, "A confus'd heap of dreams," and "the silly fables of ancient times †."

Passing

* Alcoran. The chapter—of the cow,—of Jonas,—of Hud.

† —Of cattle,—of the spoils,—of the prophets. That the Alcoran bears a very strong resemblance to the Talmud is indeed evident; but I hardly think, we can have a more striking instance of the prejudices of modern infidels, than in their comparing this motley composition to the writings of the Old and New Testament. Let the reader but take the trouble to peruse the history of Joseph by Mahomet, which is the subject of a very long chapter, and to compare it with the account of that patriarch given by Moses, and if he doth not perceive at once the immense inferiority of the former, I shall never, for my part, undertake by argument to convince him of it. To me it appears even almost incredible, that the most beautiful and most affecting passages of holy writ, should have been so wretchedly disfigur'd by a writer whose intention, we are certain, was not to burlesque them. But that every reader may be qualified to form some

Passing therefore this equivocal miracle, if I may call it so, which I imagine was of very little

notion of this miracle of a book, I have subjoin'd a specimen of it, from the chapter of *the ant* ; where we are inform'd particularly of the cause of the visit which the queen of Sheba (there called *Saba*) made to Solomon, and of the occasion of her conversion from idolatry. I have not selected this passage on account of any special utility to be found in it, for the like absurdities may be observed in every page of the performance ; but I have selected it, because it is short, and because it contains a distinct story which bears some relation to a passage of scripture. I use Mr Sale's version, which is the latest and the most approved, omitting only, for the sake of brevity, such supplementary expressions, as have been without necessity inserted by the translator. " Solomon was
 " David's heir ; and he said, O men, we have been
 " taught the speech of birds, and have had all things
 " bestowed on us ; this is manifest excellence. And
 " his armies were gathered together to Solomon, consisting of genii, and men, and birds ; and they
 " were led in distinct bands, till they came to the
 " valley of ants. An ant said, O ants, enter ye into
 " your habitations, lest Solomon and his army tread
 " you under foot, and perceive it not. And he smiled,
 " laughing at her words, and said, O Lord,
 " excite me, that I may be thankful for thy favour,
 " wherewith thou hast favoured me, and my parents ;
 " and that I may do that which is right and well-
 " pleasing

little use in *making* profelytes, whatever use it might have had, in *confirming* and *tutoring*

“pleasing to thee : and introduce me, thro’ thy
 “mercy, among thy servants the righteous. And
 “he viewed the birds, and said, What is the reason
 “that I see not the lapwing ? Is she absent ? Verily
 “I will chastise her with a severe chastisement, or I
 “will put her to death ; unless she bring me a just
 “excuse. And she tarried not long, and said, I have
 “viewed that which thou hast not viewed ; and I
 “come to thee from Saba, with a certain piece of
 “news. I found a woman to reign over them, who
 “is provided with every thing, and hath a magni-
 “ficent throne. I found her and her people to wor-
 “ship the sun, besides God : and Satan hath prepa-
 “red their works for them, and hath turned them
 “aside from the way, (wherefore they are not di-
 “rected) lest they should worship God, who bring-
 “eth to light that which is hidden in heaven and
 “earth, and knoweth whatever they conceal, and
 “whatever they discover. God ! there is no God
 “but he ; the Lord of the magnificent throne. He
 “said, We shall see whether thou hast spoken the
 “truth, or whether thou art a liar. Go with this
 “my letter, and cast it down to them ; then turn a-
 “side from them, and wait for their answer. The
 “queen said, O nobles, verily an honourable letter
 “hath been delivered to me ; it is from Solomon, and
 “this is the tenour thereof. *In the name of the*
 “*most merciful God, rise not up against me : but*
 “*come,*

ing those already made ; it may be worth while to inquire, what were the reasons, that
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“ *come, and surrender yourselves to me.* She said,
“ O nobles, advise me in my business : I will not re-
“ solve on any thing, till ye be witnesses thereof.
“ They answered, We are indued with strength,
“ and indued with great prowess in war ; but the
“ command appertaineth to thee : see therefore what
“ thou wilt command. She said, Verily kings,
“ when they enter a city, waste the same, and abase
“ the most powerful of the inhabitants thereof : and
“ so will these do. But I will send gifts to them ;
“ and will wait for what those who shall be sent, shall
“ bring back. And when the embassador came to
“ Solomon, that prince said, Will ye present me
“ with riches ? Verily that which God hath given
“ me is better than what he hath given you : but ye
“ glory in your gifts. Return to your people. We
“ will surely come to them with forces, which they
“ shall not be able to withstand ; and we will drive them
“ out humbled ; and they shall be contemptible. And
“ Solomon said, O nobles, which of you will bring me
“ her throne, before they come and surrender them-
“ selves to me ? A terrible genius answered, I will
“ bring it thee, before thou arise from thy place.
“ And one with whom was the knowledge of the
“ scripture said, I will bring it to thee, in the twink-
“ ling of an eye. And when Solomon saw it pla-
“ ced before him, he said, This is a favour of my
“ Lord, that he may make trial of me, whether I
“ will

an engine of such amazing influence was never employ'd by one who assumed a character
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“ will be grateful, or whether I will be ungrateful :
 “ and he who is grateful, is grateful to his own ad-
 “ vantage ; but if any shall be ungrateful, verily my
 “ Lord is self-sufficient and munificent. And he
 “ said, Alter her throne, that she may not know it,
 “ to the end we may see whether she be directed, or
 “ whether she be of those who are not directed. And
 “ when she was come, it was said, Is thy throne like
 “ this ? She answered, As though it were the same.
 “ And we have had knowledge bestow'd on us be-
 “ fore this, and have been resign'd. But that which
 “ she worshipped besides God, had turned her aside,
 “ for she was of an unbelieving people. It was said
 “ to her, Enter the palace. And when she saw it,
 “ she imagined it to be a great water, and she disco-
 “ vered her legs. Solomon said, Verily this is a pa-
 “ lace, evenly floored with glass. She said, O
 “ Lord, verily I have dealt unjustly with my own
 “ soul ; and I resign myself together with Solomon,
 “ to God, the Lord of all creatures.” Thus pover-
 ty of sentiment, monstrosity of invention, which al-
 ways betokens a distemper'd not a rich imagination,
 and in respect of diction the most turgid verbosity,
 so apt to be mistaken by persons of a viciated
 taste for true sublimity, are the genuine characteristics
 of the book. They appear almost in every line.
 The very titles and epithets assign'd to God are not
 exempt from them. The Lord of the daybreak, the
 Lord

so eminent, as the *chief of God's apostles*, and the *seal of the prophets*? Was it the want of address to manage an imposition of this nature? None who knows the history of this extraordinary personage, will suspect that he wanted either the genius to contrive, or the resolution and dexterity to execute, any practicable expedient for promoting his grand design; which was no less than that extensive despotism, both religious and political, he at length acquir'd. Was it that he had too much honesty to concert and carry on so gross an artifice? Those who believe him to have been an impostor in pretending a divine mission, will hardly suspect him of such delicacy in the methods he would take to accomplish

Lord of the magnificent throne, the King of the day of judgment, &c. They are pompous and insignificant. If the language of the Alcoran, as the Mahometans pretend, is indeed the language of God, the thoughts are but too evidently the thoughts of men. The reverse of this is the character of the Bible. When God speaks to men, 'tis reasonable to think that he addresses them in their own language. In the Bible you will find nothing inflated, nothing affected in the style. The words are human, but the sentiments are divine. Accordingly there is perhaps no book in the world, as hath been often justly observed, which suffers less by a literal translation into any other language.

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his aim. But in fact there is no colour of reason for such a suggestion. There was no prodigy, no miraculous interposition, which he hesitated to give out, however extravagant, when he saw it would contribute to his ends. Prodigies of which they had no other evidence but his own allegation, he knew his adversaries might *deny*, but could not *disprove*. His scruples therefore, we may well conclude, proceeded not from *probity*, but from *prudence*; and were solely against such miracles, as must be subjected to the scrutiny of other people's senses. Was it that miracle-working had before that time become so stale a device, that instead of gaining him the admiration of his countrymen, it would have expos'd him to their laughter and contempt? The most cursory perusal of the Alcoran, will, to every man of sense, afford an unanswerable confutation of this hypothesis *. Lastly, was it that
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* It is observable, that Mahomet was very much harass'd by the demands and reasonings of his opposers with regard to miracles. They were so far from despising this evidence, that they considered the power of working miracles as a never-failing badge of the prophetic office; and therefore often assur'd him, by the most solemn oaths and protestations, that they would submit implicitly to his guidance
in

he liv'd in an enlighten'd age, and amongst a civiliz'd and learned people, who were too quick-

in religion, if he would once gratify them in this particular. This artful man, who doth not seem to have been of the same opinion with the essayist, that it was easy for cunning and impudence to impose, in a matter of this kind, on the credulity of the multitude, even tho' an ignorant and barbarous multitude, absolutely refus'd to subject his mission to so hazardous a trial. There is no subject he more frequently recurs to in his Alcoran, being greatly interested to remove the doubts, which were rais'd in the minds of many by his disclaiming this power; a power which till then had ever been look'd upon as the prerogative of the prophets. The following are some of the reasons, with which he endeavours to satisfy the people on this head. 1st, The *sovereignty* of God, who is not to be call'd to account for what he gives or with-holds. 2d, The *uselessness* of miracles, because every man is foreordain'd either to believe, or to remain in unbelief; and this decree no miracles could alter. 3d, The *experienced inefficacy* of miracles in former times. 4th, The *mercy* of God, who had denied them this evidence, because the sin of their incredulity, in case he had granted it, would have been so heinous, that he could not have respited or tolerated them any longer. 5th, The *abuse* to which miracles would have been expos'd from the infidels, who would have either charged them with imposture, or imputed them to magic.

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quick-sighted to be deceiv'd by tricks, which among barbarians might have produced the most astonishing effects? Quite the reverse. He liv'd in a barbarous age, and amongst an illiterate people, with whom, if with any, he had reason to believe the grossest deceit would prove successful.

What pity was it, that Mahomet had not a counsellor so deeply vers'd in human nature as the essayist, who could have assur'd him, that there needed but effrontery and enterprise; that with these auxiliaries he had reason to hope the most impudent pretences would be crown'd with success? The too timid prophet would doubtless have remonstrated against this spirited counsel, insisting, that it was one thing to satisfy *friends*, and another thing to silence or convert *enemies*; that it was one thing to impose on mens *intelleets*, and another thing to deceive their *senses*: that tho' an attempt of the last kind should succeed with some, yet if the fraud were detected by any, and he might expect that his adversaries would exert themselves in order to detect it, the whole mystery of craft would be divulged, his friends would become suspicious,

See the chapters — of cattle, — of thunder, — of Al Hejir, — of the night-journey, — of the spider, — of the prophets.

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and the spectators of such pretended miracles would become daily more prying and critical; that the consequences would infallibly prove fatal to the whole design; and that therefore such a cheat was on no account whatever to be risked. To this methinks I hear the other replying with some earnestness, 'Make but
 'the trial, and you will certainly find,
 'that what judgment, nay and what senses
 'your auditors have, they will renounce by
 'principle in those sublime and mysterious
 'subjects; they will imagine they see and hear
 'what has no reality, nay whatever you shall
 'desire that they should see and hear. Their
 'credulity (forgive a freedom which my zeal
 'inspires) will increase your impudence, and
 'your impudence will overpower their credu-
 'lity. The smallest spark may here kindle
 'into the greatest flame; because the mate-
 'rials are always prepar'd for it. The *avidum*
 '*genus auricularum* swallow greedily, without
 'examination, whatever soothes superstition
 'and promotes wonder.' Whether the judi-
 cious reader will reckon that the prophet or
 his counsellor would have had the better in
 this debate, I shall not take upon me to de-
 cide. One perhaps (if I might be indulged
 in a conjecture) whose notions are founded
 in metaphysical refinements, or whose resolu-
 tions are influenced by oratorical declamation,
 will

will incline to the opinion of the latter. One whose sentiments are the result of a practical knowledge of mankind, will probably subscribe to the judgment of the former, and will allow, that in this instance the CAPTAIN-GENERAL and PROPHET of *Islamism* acted the more prudent part.

Shall we then say, that it was a more *obscure* theatre on which JESUS CHRIST appeared? Were his spectators *more ignorant*, or *less adverse*? The contrary of both is manifest. It may indeed be affirmed with truth, that the religion of the wild Arabs was more repugnant to the doctrine of Mahomet, than the religious dogmas of the Jews were to those of Jesus. But we shall err egregiously, if we conclude thence, that to this repugnancy the repugnancy of disposition in the professors of these religions must be proportionate. 'Tis a fine observation of the most piercing and comprehensive genius, which hath appear'd in this age, That "tho' men have a very
" strong tendency to idolatry, they are never-
" theless but little attach'd to idolatrous reli-
" gions; that tho' they have no great tenden-
" cy to spiritual ideas, they are nevertheless
" strongly attach'd to religions which injoin
" the adoration of a spiritual being*." Hence

* De l'esprit des loix, liv. 25. chap. 2.

an attachment in JEWS, CHRISTIANS, and MAHOMETANS, to their respective religions, which was never display'd by POLYTHEISTS of any denomination. But its *spirituality* was not the only cause of adherence which the Jews had to their religion. Every physical, every moral motive concurr'd in that people to rivet their attachment, and make them oppose with violence, whatever bore the face of innovation. Their religion and polity were so blended as scarce to be distinguishable: this engag'd their *patriotism*. They were selected of God preferably to other nations: this inflam'd their *pride* *. They were all under one spiritual head, the high-priest, and had their solemn festivals celebrated in one temple: this strengthened their *union*. The ceremonies of their public worship were magnificent: this flatter'd their *senses*. These ceremonies also were numerous, and occupied a great part of their time: this, to all the other grounds of attachment, super-added the force of *habit*. On the contrary, the *simplicity* of the gospel, as well as the spirit of *humility*, and *moderation*, and *charity*, and *universality*, (if I may be allow'd that term) which it breath'd, could not fail to a-

* How great influence this motive had, appears from Luke iv. 25. &c. and from Acts xxii. 21. 22.

larm a people of such a cast, and awaken, as in fact it did, the most furious opposition. Accordingly, Christianity had fifty times more success amongst idolaters, than it had among the Jews. I am therefore warranted to assert, that if the miracles of our Lord and his apostles had been an imposture, there could not, on the face of the earth, have been chosen for exhibiting them, a more unfavourable theatre than *Judea*. On the other hand, had it been any where practicable, by a display of false wonders, to make converts to a new religion, no where could a project of this nature have been conducted with greater probability of success than in *Arabia*. So much for the contrast there is betwixt the *Christian MESSIAH* and the ORPHAN CHARGE of *Abu Taleb*. So plain it is, that the *mosque* yields entirely the plea of miracles to the *synagogue* and the *church*.

BUT from HEATHENS and MAHOMETANS, let us turn our eyes to the CHRISTIAN world. The only object here, which merits our attention, as coming under the denomination of miracles ascrib'd to a new system, and as what may be thought to rival in credibility the miracles of the gospel, are those said to have been perform'd in the *primitive church*, after the times of the apostles, and

after the finishing of the sacred canon. These will probably be ascrib'd to a new system, since Christianity, for some centuries, was not (as the phrase is) *established*, or (to speak more properly) *corrupted* by human authority; and since even after such establishment, there remained long in the empire a considerable mixture of idolaters. We have the greater reason here to consider this topic, as it hath of late been the subject of very warm dispute, and as the cause of Christianity itself (which I conceive is totally distinct) seems to have been strangely confounded with it. From the manner in which the argument hath been conducted, who is there that would not conclude, that both must stand or fall together? Nothing however can be more groundless, nothing more injurious to the religion of Jesus, than such a conclusion.

The learned writer who hath given rise to this controversy, not only acknowledges, that the falsity of the miracles mention'd by the fathers, is no evidence of the falsity of the miracles recorded in scripture, but that there is even a presumption in favour of these, arising from those forgeries, which he pretends to have detected *. The justness of the re-

* Dr Middleton's prefatory discourse to his letter from Rome.

mark contain'd in this acknowledgment, will appear more clearly from the following observations.

Let it be observed, first, that supposing numbers of people are ascertain'd of the truth of some miracles, whether their conviction arise from sense or from testimony, it will surely be admitted as a consequence, that in all such persons, the presumption against miracles from uncommonness must be greatly diminished, in several perhaps totally extinguished.

Let it be observed, secondly, that if true miracles have been employ'd successfully in support of certain religious tenets, this success will naturally suggest to those, who are zealous of propagating favourite opinions in religion, to recur to the plea of miracles, as the most effectual expedient for accomplishing their end. This they will be encouraged to do on a double account: *first*, they know, that people from recent experience, are made to expect such a confirmation; *secondly*, they know, that in consequence of this experience, the incredibility, which is the principal obstruction to such an undertaking, is in a manner remov'd; and there is, on the contrary, as in such circumstances there certainly would be, a promptness in the generality to receive them.

Add to these, that if we consult the history of mankind, or even our own experience,

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we shall be convinced, that hardly hath one wonderful event actually happen'd in any country, even where there have not been such visible temptations to forgery, which hath not given rise to false rumours of other events similar, but still more wonderful. Hardly hath any person or people atchiev'd some exploits truly extraordinary, to whom common report hath not quickly attributed many others, as extraordinary at least, if not impossible. As *fame* may, in this respect, be compar'd to a *multiplying glass*, reasonable people almost always conclude in the same way concerning both; we know that there is not a real object corresponding to every appearance exhibited, at the same time we know that there must be some objects to give rise to the appearances.

I should therefore only beg of our adversaries, that, for argument's sake, they will suppose that the miracles related in the New Testament were really perform'd; and then, that they will candidly tell us, what, according to their notions of human nature, would, in all likelihood, have been the consequences. They must be very partial to a darling hypothesis, or little acquainted with the world, who will hesitate to own, that, on this supposition, 'tis not barely probable, but certain, that for a few endow'd with the miraculous power, there would soon have arisen numbers of pretenders;

ers; that from some miracles well attested, occasion would have been taken to propagate innumerable false reports. If so, with what colour of justice can the detection of many spurious reports among the primitive Christians be consider'd as a presumption against those miracles, the reality of which is the most plausible, nay the only plausible account that can be given of the origin of such reports? The presumption is too evidently on the opposite side to need illustration.

'Tis not my intention here to patronize either side of the question which the Doctor's *Free inquiry* hath occasioned. All that concerns my argument is, barely to evince, and this I imagine hath been evinced, that, granting the Doctor's plea to be well founded, there is no presumption arising hence, which tends in the lowest degree to discredit the miracles recorded in holy writ; nay, that there is a contrary presumption. In further confirmation of this truth, let me ask, Were there ever, in any region of the globe, any similar pretensions to miraculous powers, before that memorable *era*, the publication of the gospel? Let me ask again, Since those pretensions ceased, hath it ever been in the power of the most daring enthusiast, to revive them any where in favour of a new system? Authentic miracles will, for a time, give a currency to counterfeits;

feits; but as the former become less frequent, the latter become more suspected, till at length they are treated with general contempt, and disappear. The danger then is, lest men, ever prone to extremes, become as extravagantly incredulous, as formerly they were credulous. *Laziness*, the true source of both, always inclines us to admit or reject in the *gross*, without entering on the irksome task of considering things in *detail*. In the first instance, knowing some such events to be true, they *admit all without examination*; in the second, knowing some to be false, they *reject all without examination*. A procedure this, which, however excusable in the unthinking herd, is altogether unworthy a philosopher.

But it may be thought, that the claim to miracles in the early ages of the church, continued too long to be supported solely on the credit of those perform'd by our Lord and his apostles. In order to account for this, it ought to be attended to, that in the course of some centuries, the situation of affairs, with regard to religion, was really inverted. Education, and even superstition, and bigotry, and popularity, which the miracles of Christ and his apostles had to encounter, came gradually to be on the side of those wonders, said to have been perform'd in after times. If they were potent *enemies*, and such as, we have reason

to

to believe, nothing but the force of truth could vanquish; they were also potent *allies*, and may well be suppos'd able to give a temporary triumph to falsehood, especially when it had few or no enemies to combat. But in discoursing on the prodigies said to have been perform'd in primitive times, I have been insensibly carried from the point, to which I propos'd in this section to confine myself. From inquiring into miracles ascrib'd to new systems, I have proceeded to those pleaded in confirmation of systems previously establish'd, and generally receiv'd.

LEAVING so remote a period, I propose, lastly, to inquire, whether, since that time, any heresiarch whatever, any founder of a new sect, or publisher of a new system, hath pretended to miraculous powers. If the essayist had known of any such pretender, he surely would have mention'd him. But as he hath not afforded us any light on this subject, I shall just recall to the remembrance of my reader, those persons who, either as innovators or reformers, have made some figure in the church. They were the persons from whom, if from any, a plea of this kind might naturally have been expected; especially at a time when Europe was either plunged in barbarism, or but beginning to emerge out of it.

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Was ever then this high prerogative, the power of working miracles, claim'd or exercis'd by the founders of the sects of the Waldenses and Albigenes? Did Wickliff in England pretend to it? Did Huss or Jerom in Bohemia? To come nearer modern times, Did Luther in Germany. Zuinglius in Switzerland, Calvin in France, or any other of the reformers, advance this plea? Do such of them as are authors, mention in their writings any miracles they perform'd, or appeal to them as the evidences of their doctrine? Do contemporary historians alledge, that they challenged the faith of their auditors, in consequence of such supernatural powers? I admit, if they did, that their miracles might be ascrib'd to a new system. For tho' they pretended only to re-establish the Christian institution, in its native purity, expunging those pernicious interpolations, which a false philosophy had foisted into the doctrinal part, and Pagan superstition into the moral and the ritual; yet as the religion they inculcated, greatly differ'd from the faith and worship of the times, it might, in this respect, be denominated a new system; and would be encounter'd by all the violence and prejudice, which novelties in religion never fail to excite. Not that the want of real miracles was a presumption against the truth of their doctrine. The God of nature,
who

who is the God of Christians, does nothing in vain. No new revelation was pretended to; consequently there was no occasion for such supernatural support. They appeal'd to the revelation formerly bestow'd, and by all parties acknowledged, as to the proper rule in this controversy: they appeal'd to the reason of mankind as the judge; and the reason of mankind was a competent judge of the conformity of their doctrine to this unerring rule.

But how, upon the author's principles, shall we account for this moderation in the reformers? Were they, in his judgment, calm inquirers into truth? Were they dispassionate reasoners in defence of it? Far otherwise. He tells us, "They may safely be pronounced to have been universally inflam'd with the highest enthusiasm *." And doubtless we cannot expect from this hand a more amiable picture of their disciples. May not we then, in our turn, safely pronounce, this writer himself being judge, that for a man to imagine he sees what hath no reality, to impose in this manner not only on his own understanding, but even on his external senses, is a pitch of delusion higher than the highest enthusiasm

* History of Great Britain, James I. chap. 1.

can produce, and is to be imputed only to downright frenzy * ?

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* Perhaps it will be pleaded, that the working of miracles was consider'd by the leaders in the reformation as a Popish artifice, and as therefore worthy of being discarded with the other abuses which Popery had introduced. That this was not the light in which miracles were view'd by Luther, who justly possesses the first place in the list of reformers, is evident from the manner in which he argues against Muncer, the apostle of the Anabaptists. This man, without ordination, had assum'd the office of a Christian pastor. Against this conduct Luther remonstrates, as being, in his judgment, an usurpation of the sacred function. "Let him be asked," says he, "Who made him a teacher of religion? If he answers, God; let him prove it by a visible *miracle*: for 'tis by such signs that God declares himself, when he gives an extraordinary mission." When this argument was afterwards retorted on himself by the Romanists, who desir'd to know how his own vocation, originally limited and dependent, had become not only unlimited, but quite independent of the hierarchy, from which he had receiv'd it; his reply was, That the *intrepidity*, with which he had been enabled to brave so many dangers, and the *success* with which his enterprise had been crown'd, ought to be regarded as miraculous: And indeed most of his followers were of this opinion. But whether this opinion was erroneous, or whether the argument against Muncer was conclusive,

Since the world began, there hath not appear'd a more general propension to the wildest fanaticism, a greater degree of credulity in every claim that was made to the illapses of the Holy Spirit, or a more thorough contempt of all establish'd modes of worship, than appear'd in this island about the middle of the last century. 'Tis astonishing, that when the minds of men were intoxicated with enthusiasm; when every new pretender to divine illuminations was quickly surrounded by a crowd of followers, and his most incoherent effusions greedily swallow'd as the dictates of the Holy Ghost; that in such a Babel of sectaries, none

five, 'tis not my business to inquire. Thus much is evident from the story: *first*, That this reformer, far from rejecting miracles as a Romish trick, acknowledged, that in some religious questions, they are the only medium of proof; *secondly*, That notwithstanding this, he never attempted, by a show of miracles, to impose on the senses of his hearers; (if they were deceiv'd in thinking that his success and magnanimity were miraculous, 'twas not their senses, but their understanding that was deceiv'd); *lastly*, That the Anabaptists themselves, tho' perhaps the most outrageous fanatics that ever existed, did not pretend to the power of working miracles. — *Sleidan lib. 5. Luth. De votis monast. &c. Epist. ad Frid. Sax. Ducem. ap. Chytræum.*

are to be found, who advanced a claim to the power of working miracles; a claim which, in the author's opinion, tho' false, is easily supported, and wonderfully successful, especially among enthusiasts. Yet to Mr Hume himself, who hath written the history of that period, and who will not be accus'd of neglecting to mark the extravagancies effected by enthusiasm, I appeal whether this remark be just.

Will it be alledged as an exception, that one or two frantic people among the Quakers, not the leaders of the party, did actually pretend to such a power? Let it be remember'd, that this conduct had no other consequences, but to bring upon the pretenders such a general contempt, as in that fanatical and gloomy age, the most unintelligible jargon or glaring nonsense would never have been able to produce.

Will it be urged by the essayist, that even in the beginning of the present century, this plea was reviv'd in Britain by the French prophets, a set of poor visionaries, who, by the barbarity with which they had been treated in their own country, had been wrought up to madness, before they took refuge in this? I must beg leave to remind him, that it is manifest, from the history of those delirious and unhappy creatures, that by no part of their conduct did they so effectually open the eyes of mankind

kind naturally credulous, discredit their own inspirations, and ruin their cause, as by this, not less foolish than presumptuous pretence. Accordingly they are perhaps the only sect, which hath sprung up so lately, made so great a bustle for a while, and which is nevertheless at this day totally extinct. It deserves also to be remarked concerning this people, that tho' they were mad enough to imagine that they could restore a dead man to life; nay tho' they proceeded so far, as to determine and announce beforehand the day and the hour of his resurrection; yet none of them were so distracted, as to imagine, that they had seen him rise; not one of them afterwards pretended, that their prediction had been fulfill'd. Thus even a frenzy, which had quite disorder'd their intellects, could not in this instance overpower their senses.

UPON the whole, therefore, till some contrary example is produced, I may warrantably conclude,—that the religion of the BIBLE is the only religion extant, which claims to have been recommended by the evidence of *miracles*;—that tho', in different ages and countries, numberless enthusiasts have arisen, extremely few have dared to advance this plea;—that where-ever any have had the boldness to re-

cur to it, it hath prov'd the bane, and not the support, of their cause. Thus it hath been evinced, as was propos'd, that there is no presumption arising from the *history of the world*, which can in the least invalidate the argument from miracles, in defence of Christianity.

S E C T I O N III.

No miracles recorded by historians of other religions are subversive of the evidence arising from the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, or can be consider'd as contrary testimony.

‘ **W**HY is a miracle regarded as evidence of a religious doctrine? Or, ‘ What connection is there between an act ‘ of power admitted to be supernatural, and ‘ the truth of a proposition pronounced by ‘ the person who exerts that power? These are questions, which some of our infidels have exulted in as unanswerable: and they are questions, which ’tis proper to examine a little; not so much for their own sake, as because a satisfactory answer to them may throw light on the subject of this section.

A man, I suppose, of an unblemished character, advanceth doctrines in religion, unknown

known before, but not in themselves apparently impious or absurd. We interrogate him about the manner wherein he attain'd the knowledge of those doctrines. He affirms, That by no process of reasoning, nor in any other natural way, did he discover them ; but that they were reveal'd to him by the Spirit of God. It must be own'd, there is a very strong presumption against the truth of what he says ; and 'tis of consequence to inquire, whence that presumption ariseth. It is not primarily from any doubt of the man's integrity. If the fact he related, were of an ordinary nature, the reputation he has hitherto maintain'd, would secure him from being suspected of an intended deceit. It is not from any absurdity or immoral tendency we perceive in the doctrine itself. It ariseth principally, if not solely, from these two circumstances, the extreme uncommonness of such a revelation, and the great facility with which people of strong fancy may, in this particular, impose upon themselves. The man, I suppose, acquaints us further, that God, when he communicated to him the truths he publishes, communicated also the power of working miracles, such as, of giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, of raising the dead, and making whole the maimed. 'Tis evident, that we have precisely the same presumption

presumption against his being endued with such a power, as against his having obtained such a revelation. Two things are asserted: there is one presumption, and but one, against them; and it equally affects them both. Whatever proves either assertion, removes the only presumption which hinders our belief of the other. The man, I suppose, lastly, performs the miracles before us, which he said he was commision'd to perform. We can no longer doubt of a supernatural communication. We have now all the evidence which the integrity of the person could give us, as to any ordinary event attested by him, that the doctrine he delivers as from God, is from God, and therefore true.

Nay, we have more evidence than for any common fact, vouched by a person of undoubted probity. As God is both almighty and all-wise, if he hath bestow'd on any so uncommon a privilege, 'tis highly probable, that it is bestow'd for promoting some end uncommonly important. And what more important end than to reveal to men that which may be conducive to their present and eternal happiness? It may be said, That, at most, it can only prove the interposal of some power superior to human: the being who interposeth is perhaps a bad being, and intends to deceive us. This, it may be allowed,
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is *possible*; but the other is *probable*. For, *first*, From the light of nature, we have no positive evidence of the existence of such intermediate beings, good or bad. Their existence is therefore only possible. Of the existence and perfections of God, we have the highest moral assurance. *Secondly*, If there were such beings, that raising the dead, and giving sight to the blind, should come within the verge of their power, is also but possible; that they are within the sphere of omnipotence is certain. *Thirdly*, Whatever seems to imply a suspension of any of the established laws of nature, we may presume, with great appearance of reason, proceeds from the author of nature, either *immediately*, or, which amounts to the same thing, *mediately*; that is, by the intervention of some agent impower'd by him. To all these there will also accrue presumptions, not only, as was hinted already, from the character of the preacher, but from the apparent tendency of the doctrine, and from the effect it produceth on those who receive it. And now the connection between the miracle and the doctrine is obvious. The miracle removes the improbability of a supernatural communication, of which communication it is in fact an irrefragable evidence. This improbability, which

which was the only obstacle, being removed, the doctrine hath, at least, all the evidence of a common fact, attested by a man of known virtue and good sense.

In order to illustrate this further, I shall recur to the instance I have already had occasion to consider, of the Dutchman and the King of Siam. I shall suppose, that, besides the account given by the former of the freezing of water in Holland, he had inform'd the prince of the astonishing effects produced by gunpowder, with which the latter had been entirely unacquainted. Both accounts appear to him alike incredible, or, if you please, absolutely impossible. Some time afterwards, the Dutchman gets imported into the kingdom a sufficient quantity of gunpowder, with the necessary artillery. He informs the monarch of this acquisition; who having permitted him to make experiments on some of his cattle and buildings, perceives, with inexpressible amazement, that all the European had told him, of the celerity and violence with which this destructive powder operates, is strictly conformable to truth. I ask any considerate person, Would not this be enough to restore the stranger to the Indian's good opinion, which, I suppose, his former experienced honesty had intitled him to? Would it not remove the incredibility of the account
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he had given of the freezing of water in northern countries? Yet, if abstractly consider'd, what connection is there between the effects of gunpowder and the effects of cold? But the presumption arising from miracles, in favour of the doctrine published by the performer, as divinely inspired, must be incomparably stronger; since from what hath been said, it appears to have several peculiar circumstances, which add weight to it. 'Tis evident, then, that miracles are a proper proof, and perhaps the only proper proof, of a revelation from Heaven. But 'tis also evident, that miracles may be wrought for other purposes, and may not be intended as proofs of any doctrine whatsoever.

THUS much being premised, I shall examine another very curious argument of the essayist: "There is no testimony," says he, "for any prodigy, that is not oppos'd by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of the testimony, but even the testimony destroys itself *." In order to illustrate this strange position, he observes, that, "in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary; and that it is impossible the religions of an-

* p. 190. &c.

"cient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, and of Chi-
 "na, should all of them be established on
 "any solid foundation. Every miracle there-
 "fore pretended to have been wrought in
 "any of these religions, (and all of them
 "abound in miracles) as its direct scope is
 "to establish the particular system to which
 "it is attributed, so it has the same force,
 "tho' more indirectly, to overthrow every o-
 "ther system. In destroying a rival system,
 "it likewise destroys the credit of those mira-
 "cles, on which that system was established;
 "so that all the prodigies of different reli-
 "gions are to be regarded as contrary facts,
 "and the evidences of these prodigies, whe-
 "ther weak or strong, as opposite to each o-
 "ther." Never did an author more artfully
 avail himself of indefinite expressions. With
 what admirable sleight does he vary his phra-
 ses, so as to make the inadvertent reader look
 upon them as synonymous, when in fact their
 significations are totally distinct? Thus what,
 by a most extraordinary idiom, is called at
 first, 'miracles wrought in a religion,' we
 are next to regard, as 'miracles attributed
 to a particular system,' and lastly, as 'mira-
 'cles, the direct scope of which is to establish
 'that system.' Every body, I will venture
 to say, in beginning to read the sentence, if
 he forms any notion of what the author
 means

means by a 'miracle wrought in a religion,' understands it barely as a 'miracle wrought among those who profess a particular religion,' the words appearing to be us'd in the same latitude, as when we call the traditional tales current among the Jews, tho' they should have no relation to religion, Jewish tales; and those in like manner Mahometan or Pagan tales, which are current among Mahometans or Pagans. Such a miracle, the reader, ere he is aware, is brought to consider as a miracle attributed to a particular system; nay further, as 'a miracle, the direct scope of which is to establish that system.' Yet nothing can be conceiv'd more different than the meaning of these expressions, which are here jumbled together as equivalent.

'Tis plain, that all the miracles of which there is any record, come under the first denomination. They are all suppos'd to have been wrought before men, or among men; and where-ever there are men, there is religion of some kind or other. Perhaps too all may, in a very *improper* sense, be attributed to a religious system. They all imply an interruption of the ordinary course of nature. Such an interruption, where-ever it is observed, will be ascrib'd to the agency of those divinities that are ador'd by the observers, and so may be said to be attributed by them to

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their

their own system. But where are the miracles (those of holy writ excepted) of which you can say with propriety, it is their direct scope to establish a particular system? Must we not then be strangely blinded by the charm of a few ambiguous terms, if we are made to confound things so widely different? Yet this confusion is the very basis, on which the author founds his reasoning, and rears this tremendous doctrine; That 'a miracle of Mahomet, or any of his successors,' and, by parity of reason, a miracle of Christ, or any of his apostles, 'is refuted (as if it had been 'mentioned, and had, in express terms, been 'contradicted) by the testimony of Titus Livius, Plutarch, Tacitus, and of all the authors, Chinese, Grecian, and Roman-Catholic, who have related any miracles in 'their particular religions.' Here all the miracles, that have been related by men of different religions, are blended, as coming under the common denomination of miracles the direct scope of which was to establish those particular religious systems; an insinuation, in which there is not even the shadow of truth.

That the reader may be satisfied on this point, I must beg his attention to the following observations concerning the miracles of profane history. *First*, Many facts are related

ted as miraculous, where we may admit the fact, without acknowledging the miracle. Instances of this kind we have in relations concerning comets, eclipses, meteors, earthquakes, and suchlike. *Secondly*, The miracles may be admitted as genuine, and the manner in which historians account for them, rejected as absurd. The one is a matter of testimony, the other of conjecture. In this a man is influenced by education, by prejudices, by received opinions. In every country, as was observ'd already, men will recur to the theology of the place, for the solution of every phenomenon suppos'd miraculous. But, that it was the scope of the miracle to support the theology, is one thing; and that fanciful men thought they discover'd in the theology the causes of the miracle, is another. The inhabitants of Lystra accounted, from the principles of their own religion, for the miracle perform'd in their city by Paul and Barnabas *. Was it therefore the scope of that miracle to support the Lycaonian religion? *Thirdly*, Many miracles are recorded, as produced directly by Heaven, without the ministration of men: by what construction are these discover'd to be proofs of a particular system? Yet these also, where-ever they

* Acts xiv. 8. &c

happen, will be accounted for by the natives of the country, from the principles of their own superstition. Had any of the Pagan citizens escap'd the ruin in which Sodom was miraculously involved, they would doubtless have fought for the cause of this destruction in the established mode of polytheism, and would probably have imputed it to the vengeance of some of their deities, incurr'd by the neglect of some frivolous ceremony. Would it therefore have been the scope of the miracle to confirm this nonsense? *Fourthly*, Even miracles said to have been perform'd by a man, are no evidences of the truth of that man's opinions; such, I mean, as he pretends not to have receiv'd by revelation, but by the exercise of reason, by education, or by information from other men; no more than a man's being endow'd with bodily strength greater than ordinary, would prove him to be superior to others in his mental faculties. I conclude with declaring, that if instances shall be produced, of miracles wrought by men of probity, in proof of doctrines which they affirm to have been reveal'd to them from Heaven, and which are repugnant to the doctrine of the Bible, then I shall think it equitable to admit, that religious miracles contradict one another. Then will reasonable people be reduced to the dilemma,
 either

either of disproving the allegations on one side, or of acknowledging that miracles can be no evidence of revelation. No attempt however hath as yet been made by any writer to produce an instance of this kind.

‘ But will nothing less satisfy ? ’ replies the author. ‘ Will not the predictions of augurs and oracles, and the intimations said to have been given by the gods or saints in dreams and visions, of things not otherwise knowable by those to whom they were thus intimated ; will not these, and suchlike prodigies, serve in some degree as evidence ? ’ As evidence of what ? Shall we say, of any religious principles convey’d at the same time by revelation ? No, ’tis not even pretended, that there were any such principles so convey’d : but as evidence of principles which had been long before entertain’d, and which were originally imbib’d from education, and from education only. That the evidence here, supposing the truth of the facts, is at best but very indirect, and by no means on the same footing with that of the miracles recorded in the gospel, might be easily evinced, if there were occasion. But there is in reality no occasion, since there is no such evidence of the facts as can justly intitle them to our notice. Let it be remember’d, that, in the fourth section of the first part, it was shown,

that there is the greatest disparity, in respect of evidence, betwixt miracles perform'd in proof of a religion *to be* established, and in *contradiction* to opinions generally receiv'd; and miracles perform'd, on the contrary, in support of a religion *already* established, and in *confirmation* of opinions generally receiv'd; that, in the former case, there is the strongest presumption *for* the miracles, in the latter *against* them. Let it also be remember'd, that in the preceding section it was shown, that the religion of the Bible is the only religion extant, which claims to have been usher'd into the world by miracles; that this prerogative neither the Pagan religion, the Mahometan, nor the Roman-Catholic, can, with any appearance of reason, arrogate; and that, by consequence, there is one of the strongest presumptions possible *for* the miracles of the gospel, which is not only wanting in the miracles of other religions, but which is contrasted by the strongest presumption possible *against* these miracles. And tho' this presumption should not, in all cases, be accounted absolutely insuperable, we must at least say, it gives an immense superiority to the proofs of Christianity. 'Twere an endless and a fruitless task, to canvass particularly the evidence of all the pretended miracles either of Paganism or Popery, (for on this

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head Mahometism is much more modest) but as the author hath selected some, which he considers as the best attested, of both religions, these shall be examin'd severally in the two subsequent sections. From this examination a tolerable judgment may be form'd concerning the pretensions of these two species of superstition.

But from what hath been said, it is evident, that the contrariety which the author pretends to have discover'd in the miracles said to have been wrought, as he expresseth it, in different religions, vanishes entirely on a close inspection. He is even sensible of this himself; and, as is customary with orators, the more inconclusive his reasons are, so much the more positive are his assertions. "This argument," says he, "may appear over subtle and refin'd;" indeed so subtle and refin'd, that it is invisible altogether; "*but* — is not *in reality* different from the reasoning of a judge, who supposes that the credit of two witnesses maintaining a crime against any one, is destroyed by the testimony of two others, who affirm him to have been two hundred leagues distant, at the same instant when the crime is said to have been committed." After the particle *but*, with which this clause begins, the reader naturally expects such an explication of the argument, as will convince him, that tho'
subtile

subtile and refin'd, it hath solidity and strength. Instead of this, he hath only the author's word warranting it to be good to all intents : " But is not in reality different," &c. The analogy between his example and his argument seems to be but very distant ; I shall therefore, without any comment, leave it with the reader as I find it.

THUS it appears, that, for aught the author hath as yet prov'd, no miracles recorded by historians of other religions are subversive of the evidence arising from the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, or can justly be considered as contrary testimony.

SECTION IV.

Examination of the PAGAN miracles mentioned by Mr Hume.

SHOULD one read attentively the *Essay on miracles*, and consider it solely as a philosophical disquisition on an abstract question, like most of the other pieces in the same collection ; he could not fail to wonder, what had induced the author so suddenly to change sides in the debate, and, by doing so, to contradict himself

self in terms the most express. Does he not, in the latter part of that performance, as warmly contend for the reality of some miracles, as he had pleaded in the former part, for the *impossibility* of all? 'Tis true, he generally concludes concerning those, that they are 'gross and palpable falsehoods.' But this serves only to render his conduct the more mysterious, as that conclusion is always preceded by an attempt to evince, that we have the greatest reason to receive them as 'certain and 'infallible truths.' Nay, so entirely doth his *zeal* make him forget even his most positive assertions, (and what inconsistencies may not be dreaded from an excess of *zeal*!) that he shows minutely, we have those very evidences for the miracles he is pleas'd to patronize, which, he had strenuously argued, were not to be found in support of any miracles whatever.

"There is not to be found," he affirms *,
 "in all history, a miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestion'd
 "good sense, education, and learning, as to
 "secure us against all delusion in themselves;
 "of such undoubted integrity, as to place
 "them beyond all suspicion of any design to

* p. 183.

"deceive

“deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose, in case of being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time attesting facts perform’d in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable.” We need only turn over a few pages of the *Essay*, and we shall find the author taking great pains to convince us, that all these circumstances concurr’d in support of certain miracles, which, notwithstanding his *general resolution*, he has thought fit to honour with a very particular attention.

He has not indeed told us *how many* witnesses, in his way of reckoning, will constitute ‘a sufficient number;’ but for some miracles which he relates, he gives us *clouds* of witnesses, one cloud succeeding another: for the Molinists, who tried to discredit them, “soon found themselves overwhelm’d by a cloud of *new* witnesses, one hundred and twenty in number*.” As to the character of the witnesses, “most of them were persons of credit and substance in Paris†;” again, those miracles “were attested by witnesses of credit and distinction, before judges of un-

* p. 197. in the note. † ib.

“question’d

“question’d integrity* ;” and, “they were
 “prov’d by witnesses, before the officialty or
 “bishop’s court of Paris, under the eyes of
 “Cardinal Noailles, whose character for inte-
 “grity and capacity was never contested even
 “by his enemies † ;” again, “the secular
 “clergy of France, particularly the rectors or
 “*curés* of Paris, give testimony to these impo-
 “stures, than whom no clergy are more ce-
 “lebrated for strictness of life and manners ‡ .”
 Once more, one principal witness, “*Monsieur*
 “*de Montgeron*, was counsellor or judge of
 “the parliament of Paris, a man of figure and
 “character || ;” another “no less a man than
 “the *Duc de Chatillon*, a Duke and Peer of
 “France, of the highest rank and family *.”
 ’Tis strange, if *credit*, and *substance*, and *dis-*
tinction, and *capacity*, are not sufficient se-
 curities to us, that the witnesses were not
 ‘themselves deluded ;’ ’tis strange, if *uncontest-*
ed integrity, and *eminent strictness* of life and
 manners, cannot remove ‘all suspicion of any
 design in them to deceive others ;’ ’tis strange,
 if one who was *counsellor* of the parliament
 of Paris, a man of figure and character, and
 if another who was a *Duke* and Peer of France,
 of the highest rank and family, had not ‘a

* p. 195. † p. 196. in the note. ‡ p. 109. in
 the note. || p. 195. in the note. * p. 199 in
 the note.

‘ great deal to lose, in case of being detected
 ‘ in any falsehood :’ nay, and if all those wit-
 nesses of *credit* and *distinction*, ‘ had not also
 ‘ a great deal to lose ;’ “ since the Jesuits, a
 “ learned body, supported by the civil magi-
 “ strate, were determin’d enemies to those o-
 “ pinions, in whose favour the miracles were
 “ said to have been wrought* ;” and since
 “ *Monsieur Herault*, the lieutenant *de police*,
 “ of whose great reputation, all who have
 “ been in France about that time, have heard ;
 “ and whose vigilance, penetration, activity,
 “ and extensive intelligence, have been much
 “ talk’d of; since this magistrate, who by the
 “ nature of his office is almost absolute, was
 “ invested with full powers on purpose to sup-
 “ press these miracles, and frequently seized
 “ and examin’d the witnesses and subjects of
 “ them; though he could never reach any
 “ thing satisfactory against them †.” As to
 the only remaining circumstance, ‘ their being
 ‘ perform’d in a public manner, and in a cele-
 ‘ brated part of the world,’ this concurred al-
 so. They were perform’d, we are told, “ in
 “ a learned age, and on the most eminent
 “ theatre that is now in the world ‡ ;” besides,

* p. 195.

† p. 195.

† p. 197. in the note.

“twenty-two rectors or *curés* of Paris, with
 “infinite earnestness, pressed the Archbishop,
 “an enemy to the Jansenists, to examine those
 “miracles, which they assert to be known to
 “the whole world, and indisputably certain*”.

Thus the essayist hath laid us under the disagreeable necessity of inferring, that he is either very rash in his general assertions, or useth very great amplification in his particular narrations. Perhaps in both inferences, we shall find, upon inquiry, that there is some truth. In his *History of Great Britain*, he gives us notice †, that he addressed himself “to a more distant posterity, than will ever
 “be reach’d by any local or temporary theology.” Why did he not likewise, in writing the *Essays*, entertain this grand idea? It would have been of use to him. It would have prevented his falling into those inconsistencies, which his too great attention and antipathy to what he calls a *local or temporary theology*, only could occasion; and which, when that theology, according to his hypothesis, shall be extinct, and when all our religious controversies shall be forgotten, must appear unaccountable and ridiculous. People will not then have the means of discovering, what is so obvious to us his contemporaries, that he only assumes the appearance of an advocate

* p. 196. in the note.

† James I. chap. 2.

for some miracles, which are disbeliev'd by the generality of Protestants, his countrymen, in order, by the comparifon, to vilify the miracles of facred writ, which are acknowledged by them.

BUT to defcend to particulars, I fhall begin with confidering thofe miracles, for which the author is indebted to the ancient Pagans. Firft, in order to convince us, how eafy a matter it is for cunning and impudence to impofe by falfe miracles on the credulity of barbarians, he introduces the ftory of Alexander of Pontus*. The juftnefs of the account he gives of this impoftor from Lucian, I fhall not difpute. But that it may appear, how little the Chriftian religion is affected by this relation, notwithstanding fome infinuations he hath intermixt with it, I fhall make the following remarks.

It is of importance to know, what was the profeflion of this once fo famous, tho' now forgotten Paphlagonian. Was he a publifher of ftrange gods? No †. Was he the found-
er

* p. 188. &c.

† The learn'd and judicious author of the *Observations on the converfion and apoftleſhip of Saint Paul*, hath inadvertently ſaid of Alexander, that he introduced

er of a new system in religion? No. What was he then? He was no other than a professed fortune-teller. What were the arts by which he carried on this gainful trade? The essayist justly remarks, that 'it was a wise policy in him, to lay the first scene of his impostures in a country, where the people were extremely ignorant and stupid, and ready to swallow the grossest delusion.' For, "had Alexander fix'd his residence at Athens, the philosophers of that renown'd mart of learning, had immediately spread thro' the whole Roman empire their sense of the matter; which, being supported by so great authority, and display'd by all the force of reason and eloquence, had entirely open'd the eyes of mankind." I shall beg leave to remark another instance of good policy in him. He

ced a *new god* into Pontus. The truth is, he only exhibited a reproduction of *Esculapius*, a well-known deity in those parts, to whom he gave indeed the *new name* GLYCON. In this there was nothing unsuitable to the genius of the mythology. Accordingly, we do not find, that either the priests, or the people, were in the least alarm'd for the religion of the country, or ever charged Alexander as an *innovator* in religious matters. On the contrary, the greatest enemies he had to encounter, were not the religionists, but the latitudinarians.

attempted not to gain the veneration of the multitude by opposing, but by adopting their religious prejudices. His whole plan of deceit was founded in the established superstition. The author himself will acknowledge, it would have been extreme folly in him to have acted otherwise : and all the world, I believe, will agree in thinking, that, in that case, he could not have had the smallest probability of success. What were the miracles he wrought? I know of none, unless we will dignify with that name, some feats of legerdemain, perform'd mostly by candle-light ; which, in many parts of Europe, we may daily see equall'd, nay far exceeded, by those of modern jugglers. Add to these some oracles he pronounced, concerning which, if we may form a judgment from the account and specimen given us by Lucian, we should conclude, that, like other Heathen oracles, they were generally unintelligible, equivocal, or false. Before whom did he exhibit his wonders? Before none, if he could help it, that were not thorough believers in the popular system. His nocturnal mysteries were always introduced with an AVAUNT to *Atheists, Christians, and Epicureans* : and indeed it was dangerous for any such to be present at them. Mr Hume says, that, " from his ignorant Paphlagonians, he was enabled to proceed to the in-

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“lifting of votaries among the Grecian philosophers.” On what authority he advances this, I have not been able to discover. He adds, “and men of the most eminent rank and distinction in Rome.” Lucian mentions one man of rank, Rutilianus, among the votaries of the prophet; an honest man he calls him, but at the same time the weakest, the most superstitious that ever liv’d. As to the military expedition, which one would imagine from Mr Hume’s expression, the Emperor had resolv’d on, in consequence of the encouragement which the delusive prophecies of this impostor gave him, we find, on the contrary, it was undertaken, before those prophecies were uttered. But further, Did Alexander risk any thing in assuming the character of the *interpreter* of ESCULAPIUS? Did he lose, or did he suffer any thing in defence of it? Quite the reverse. He enriched himself by this most ingenious occupation. I shall say nothing of the picture which Lucian gives of his morals, of the many artifices which he us’d, or of the atrocious crimes which he perpetrated. It must be own’d, that the principal scope for calumny and detraction is in what concerns the private life and moral character. Lucian was an enemy, and, by his own account, had received the highest provocation.

provocation. But I avoid every thing, on this topic, that can admit a question.

Where, I would gladly know, lies the resemblance between this impostor and the first publishers of the gospel? Every one, on the most superficial review, may discover, that, in all the material circumstances, they are perfect contrasts. There appears not therefore to be great danger in the poignant remark with which the author concludes this relation: "Tho' much to be wish'd, it does not always happen, that every *Alexander* meets with a *Lucian*, ready to expose and detect his impostures." Lest the full import of this emphatical clause should not be apprehended, the author hath been still more explicit in the note: "It may here perhaps be objected, that I proceed rashly, and form my notions of Alexander, merely from the account given of him by *Lucian*, a profess'd enemy. *It were indeed to be wish'd*, that some of the accounts published by his followers and accomplices had remain'd. The opposition and contrast betwixt the character and conduct of the same man, as drawn by a friend or an enemy, is as strong, even in common life, much more in these religious matters, as that betwixt any two men in the world, betwixt Alexander and St Paul for instance." Who can forbear to lament the
uncommon

uncommon distress of an author, obliged every moment to recur to unavailing wishes? Mr Hume, however, in this calamitous situation, solaceth himself, as well as he can, by supposing what he cannot assert. He supposeth what would have been the case, if his wishes could have been gratified; and artfully insinuates, in this manner, to his readers; that if we had the character and conduct of the apostle, delineated by as able an enemy as Lucian, we should find the portrait as ugly as that of Alexander.

Let us then for once suppose, what the author so ardently wishes, that such an enemy had undertaken the history of Paul of Tarsus. I can easily conceive what a different representation we should, in that case, have had, of the mental endowments and moral disposition, as well as of the inducements and views of this Christian missionary. I can conceive also, that both his actions and discourses might have been strangely disfigured. But if the biographer had maintain'd any regard, I say not, to truth, but to probability; there are some things, we may be absolutely certain, he would never have advanced. He would not surely have said of Paul, that he was by profession a cunning man, or *conjuror*; one who, for a little money, either told people their fortunes, or taught them how to recover

cover stolen goods. He would not, I suppose, have pretended, that where-ever the apostle went, he flatter'd the superstition of the populace, in order to gain them, and founded all his pretensions on the popular system. He would not have alledged, that Paul *enriched* himself, or that he could ever have the prospect of enriching himself, by his vocation; nay, or that he risked nothing, or suffer'd nothing, by it. He could not have said concerning him, that he *declin'd* the audience or scrutiny of men, whose opinions in religion differ'd from those on which his mission was founded. He durst not have imputed to him the *wise policy* of laying the scene of his impostures, only where ignorance, barbarism, and stupidity prevail'd: as it is unquestionable, that our apostle traversed great part, not only of Asia Minor, but of Macedonia, and Achaia; fixed his residence eighteen months at Corinth, a city not less celebrated for the polite arts, than for its populousness and riches; preached publicly at Athens, before the Stoics and the Epicureans, and even before the Areopagus, the most venerable judicature in Greece; not afraid of what the philosophers of that renowned mart of learning, might spread through the whole Roman empire, concerning him and his doctrine; nay, and lastly
preached

preached at Rome itself, the mistress and metropolis of the world.

The reader will observe, that, in this comparison, I have shunned every thing that is of a private, and therefore of a dubious nature. The whole is founded on such actions and events as were notorious ; which 'tis not in the power of contemporary historians to falsify ; such with regard to Alexander, as a *votary* could not have dissembled ; such with regard to Paul, as an *enemy* durst not have denied. We are truly indebted to the essayist, who intending to exhibit a *rival* to the apostle, hath produced a character which, we find on making the comparison, serves only for a foil. Truth never shines with greater lustre, than when confronted with falsehood. The evidence of our religion, how strong soever, appears not so irresistible, consider'd by itself, as when by comparison we perceive, that none of those artifices and circumstances attended its propagation, which the whole course of experience shows to be necessary to render imposture successful.

THE next topic on which the ingenious author hath bestow'd some flourishes, is the miracle " which Tacitus reports of Vespasian, " who cured a blind man in Alexandria, by " means of his spittle, and a lame man by the
" mere

"mere touch of his foot, in obedience to a
 "vision of the god Serapis, who had enjoin'd
 "them to have recourse to the emperor, for
 "these miraculous and extraordinary cures *."
 The story he introduces with informing us,
 that it is "one of the best attested miracles
 "in all profane history." If so, it will the
 better serve for a sample of what may be ex-
 pected from that quarter. "Every circum-
 "stance," he tells us, "seems to add weight
 "to the testimony, and might be displayed at
 "large, with all the force of argument and e-
 "loquence, if any one were now concern'd to
 "enforce the evidence of that exploded and
 "idolatrous superstition." For my part, were
 I concern'd to enforce the evidence of that
 exploded and idolatrous superstition, I should
 not wish the story were in better hands than
 in the author's. He is by no means deficient
 in eloquence; and if sometimes there appear
 a deficiency in argument, that is not imputable
 to him, but to the subject, which cannot furnish
 him with any better: and tho' I do not suspect
 him to be in the least concerned to re-esta-
 blish Paganism, yet 'tis well known, that ha-
 tred to his adversary may as strongly animate
 an advocate to exert himself, as affection to
 his client.

* p. 192, &c.

But to proceed to the story : First, the author pleads “the gravity, solidity, age, and
 “ probity of so great an emperor, who, thro’
 “ the whole course of his life, convers’d in a
 “ familiar way with his friends and courtiers,
 “ and never affected those extraordinary airs
 “ of divinity assum’d by Alexander and De-
 “ metrius.” To this character, the justness
 of which I intend not to controvert, I shall
 beg leave to add, what is equally indubitable,
 and much to the purpose, that no emperor
 shou’d a stronger inclination to corroborate
 his title by the sanction of the gods. than the
 prince of whom he is speaking. This, doubt-
 less, he thought the more necessary in his case,
 as he was of an obscure family, and nowise
 related to any of his predecessors. How
 fond he was of pleading *visions*, and *pre-
 sages*, and *auguries*, in his favour, all the
 world knows *.

The author adds, “ The historian, a con-
 “ temporary writer, noted for candour and
 “ veracity, and withal the greatest and most
 “ penetrating genius perhaps of all antiquity,
 “ and so free from any tendency to supersti-
 “ tion and credulity, that he even lies under

* Auctoritas, et quasi majestas quædam, ut scilicet
 inopinato et adhuc novo principi decrat, hæc quoque
 accessit. SUTTON.

“the contrary imputation of atheism and profaneness.” This would say a great deal, if the character of the historian were of any moment in the question. Doth Tacitus pretend that he was himself a witness of the miracle? No. Doth he mention it as a thing which he believes? No. In either case I acknowledge, that the reputation of the *relater* for candour and penetration, must have added weight to the relation, whether consider’d as his *testimony*, or barely as his *opinion*. But is it fair to plead the veracity of the writer in proof of every popular rumour mention’d by him? His veracity is only concern’d to satisfy us, that it was actually reported, as he relates; or that the attempt was made, and the miracle pretended; a point which, I presume, nobody would have disputed, altho’ the authority had been less than that of Tacitus. Indeed the historian doth not say directly, whether he believes the miracle or not; but by his manner of telling it, he plainly insinuates, that he thought it ridiculous. In introducing it, he intimates the utility of such reports to the Emperor’s cause. “By which,” says he, “the favour of Heaven, and the appointment of the gods, might be urged in support of his title*.” When he names the

* *Quæis coelestis favor, et quædam in Vespasiano inclinatio numinum ostenderetur.*

god *Serapis*, as warning the blind man to recur to Vespasian, he adds, in evident contempt and derision of his godship, "Who is ador'd above all others by the *Egyptians*, a people addicted to superstition *." Again he speaks of the Emperor, as induced to hope for success, by the persuasive tongues of flatterers †. A serious believer of the miracle would hardly have used such a style in relating it. But to what purpose did he then relate it? The answer is easy. Nothing could be more characteristic of the *Emperor*, or could better show the arts he had recourse to, and the hold which flattery had of him; nothing could be more characteristic of the *Alexandrians*, the people amongst whom the miracle is said to have been wrought.

"The persons," says the essayist, "from whose testimony he related the miracle, of established character for judgment and veracity, as we may well suppose; eye-witnesses of the fact, and confirming their verdict, after the Flavian family were despoil'd of the empire, and could no longer give any reward as the price of a lie." Persons of *established character for judgment and veracity*! Who told Mr Hume so? 'Twas not Tacitus. He only denominates

* Quem dedita superstitionibus gens ante alios colit.

† Vocibus adulantium in spem induci.

them in general * : “ They who were pre-
 “ sent,” and “ a crowd of bystanders.”
 The author, conscious that he advances this
 without even the shadow of authority, hath
 subjoined, in order to palliate the matter, as
we may well suppose. An admirable exped-
 dient for supplying a weak plea, with those
 convenient circumstances that can give it
 strength ! When fact fails, which is not sel-
 dom the case, we need but apply to supposition,
 whose help is always near. But if this
 be allowed to take the place of argument, I
 see no reason why I may not avail myself of
 the privilege of supposing, as well as the au-
 thor. The witnesses then, I will suppose, were
 mostly an ignorant rabble : but I wrong my
 cause ; I have a better foundation than sup-
 posal, having Tacitus himself, and all antiqui-
 ty on my side, when I add, deeply immers’d
 in *superstition*, particularly attach’d to the
 worship of *Serapis*, and keenly engaged in
 support of *Vespasian*, ALEXANDRIA having
 been the first city of note that publicly declar-
 ed for him. Was it then matter of surprise,
 that a story, which at once sooth’d the super-
 stition of the populace, and favour’d their
 political schemes, should gain ground among
 them ? Can we justly wonder, that the wiser
 few, who were not deceiv’d, should connive

* Qui interfuere. — Quæ astabat multitudo.

at, or even contribute to promote a deceit, which was highly useful to the cause wherein themselves were embarked, and at the same time highly grateful to the many? Lastly, can we be surprised that any, who, for seven and twenty years, had, from motives of interest, and ambition, and popularity, propagated a falsehood, should not afterwards be willing to expose themselves as liars?

The author finishes the story thus: "To which if we add the public nature of the facts related, it will appear, that no evidence can well be suppos'd stronger for so gross and so palpable a falsehood." As to the nature of the facts, we are told by Tacitus, that when Vespasian consulted the physicians, whether such maladies were curable by human art, they declared *, that "in the one the power of sight was not extinct, but would return, were the obstacles removed; that in the other, the joints had suffer'd some dislocation, which by a salutary pressure might be redressed." From this account we are naturally led to conclude, that the disorders were not so conspicuous, but that either they might have been feigned,

* Huic non exesam vim luminis, et redituram, si pellerentur obstantia: illi elapsos in pravam artus, si salubris vis adhibeatur, posse integrari.

where they were not ; or that cures might have been pretended, where none were perform'd. I think it is even a further presumption of the truth of this conclusion, that Suetonius, the only other Roman historian who mentions the miracle, (I know not how he hath been overlook'd by Mr Hume) differs from Tacitus, in the account he gives of the lameness. The one represents it as being in the hand, the other, as in the leg *.

There are other circumstances regarding this story, on which I might make some remarks ; but shall forbear, as it is impossible to enter into a minute discussion of particulars, that appear but trivial, when consider'd severally, without growing tiresome to the bulk of readers. I shall therefore only subjoin these simple questions. *First*, What emperor or other potentate was flattered in his dignity and pretensions by the miracles of our Lord ? What eminent personage found himself interested to support, by his authority and influence, the credit of these miracles ? *Again*, What popular superstition or general and rooted

* Manum æger. TACITUS. Debili crure. SÜETONIUS. Mr Hume, in the last edition of the *Essay*, mentions Suetonius, but takes no notice of this difference between his account and that of Tacitus.

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prejudices were they calculated to confirm? These two circumstances, were there no other, make the greatest odds imaginable betwixt the miracles of VESPASIAN and those of JESUS CHRIST.

So much for the PAGAN miracles mentioned by the author.

SECTION V.

Examination of the POPISH miracles mentioned by Mr Hume.

THE author soon descends from ancient to modern times, and leaving *Paganism*, recurs to *Popery*, a much more fruitful source of lying wonders.

THE first of this kind he takes notice of *, is a Spanish miracle recorded in the memoirs of Cardinal *de Retz*. The story, he says, is very memorable, and may well deserve our consideration. “ When that intriguing politician fled into Spain, to avoid the persecution of his enemies, he pass’d thro’ Sara-

* p. 193. &c.

“ goffa, the capital of Arragon; where he was
 “ shown in the cathedral church, a man,
 “ who had serv’d twenty years as a door-
 “ keeper of the church, and was well known
 “ to every body in town, that had ever paid
 “ their devotions at that cathedral. He had
 “ been for so long a time wanting a leg; but
 “ recover’d that limb, by the rubbing of holy
 “ oil upon the stump; *and, when the cardinal*
 “ *examin’d it, he found it to be a true natural*
 “ *leg, like the other.*” Would not any per-
 son imagine, from the last words of the sen-
 tence, that the cardinal had order’d the man
 to put off his shoes and stockings, that, by
 touch as well as by sight, he might be satisfi-
 ed, there was no artifice us’d, but that both
 his legs consisted of genuine flesh and bone?
 Yet the truth is, his Eminency did not think
 it worth while to examine any one circum-
 stance of this wonderful narration, but con-
 tented himself with reporting it precisely as it
 had been told him. His words literally trans-
 lated are, “ In that church they showed me a
 “ man, whose business it was to light the lamps,
 “ of which they have a prodigious number,
 “ telling me, that he had been seen seven
 “ years at the gate, with one leg only. I
 “ saw him there with two *.” Not one word
 of

* L’on m’y montra un homme, qui servoit à allu-
 mer

of trial or examination, or even so much as a single question asked on the subject; not a syllable of his finding the leg to be either true or false, natural or artificial, like the other or unlike. I have a better opinion both of the candour and of the good sense of Mr Hume, than to imagine, he would have design'dly misrepresented this story, in order to render it fitter for his purpose. I believe the source of this error hath been solely the trusting to his memory in the relation which he gave, and not taking the trouble to consult the passage in the memoirs. This conjecture appears the more probable, as he hath made some other alterations, which are nowise conducive to his design; such as, that the man had been seen in the church *twenty* years wanting a leg, and that he was a *door-keeper*; whereas the memoir-writer says only *seven* years, and that he was one *who lighted the lamps* *.

“ This

mer les lampes, qui y font en nombre prodigieux; et l'on me dit, qu'on l'y avoit vu sept ans a la porte de cette eglise, avec une seule jambe. Je l'y vis avec deux. *Liv. 4. l'an 1654.*

* Since finishing this tract, I have seen an edition of Mr Hume's essays, &c. later than that here referr'd to. It is printed at London 1760. I must do the
author

“This miracle was vouch’d,” says the author, “by all the canons of the church; and the whole company in town were appeal’d to, for a confirmation of the fact, whom the Cardinal found, by their zealous devotion, to be thorough believers of the miracle.” ’Tis true, that the company in town were appeal’d to, by those ecclesiastics; but ’tis also true, that *De Retz*, by his own account, seems not to have asked any man a question on the subject. He acknowledges indeed, that an anniversary festival, instituted in commemoration of the miracle, was celebrated by a vast concourse of people of all ranks.

“Here,” continues the essayist, “the relation was also contemporary to the suppos’d prodigy, of an incredulous and libertine character, as well as of great genius.” But of what weight, in this affair, is either the genius or the incredulity of the relater, since, by Mr Hume’s confession, he had no faith in the relation? Strange indeed is the use which the essayist makes of this circumstance.

author the justice to observe, that, in this edition, he hath corrected the mistake, as to the cardinal’s examining the man’s leg, of which he only says, “The cardinal assures us, that he saw him with two legs.” He still calls him a *door-keeper*, and says, that he had served *twenty* years in this capacity.

“What

“What *adds mightily*,” says he, “to the force
 “of the evidence, and may double our sur-
 “prise on this occasion, is, that the cardinal
 “himself, who relates the story, seems not to
 “give any credit to it.” It doth not in the
 least surprise me, that the cardinal gives no
 credit to this relation; but I am beyond mea-
 sure surprised, that Mr Hume should repre-
 sent this circumstance as *adding mightily* to the
 force of the evidence. Is then a story which
 is reported by a man of genius, the more cre-
 dible that he doth not believe it? Or, Is it
 the more incredible that he doth believe it?
 What would the author have said, if the car-
 dinal had told us, that he gave credit to the re-
 lation? Might he not, in that case, have very
 pertinently pleaded the great genius, and pe-
 netration, and incredulity of the relater, as
adding mightily to the force of the evidence?
 On that hypothesis, he surely might, for pret-
 ty obvious reasons. Uncommon penetration
 qualifies a man for detecting fraud; and it re-
 quires evidence greater than ordinary to sur-
 mount incredulity. The belief therefore of
 such a person as the cardinal, who had not
 only the means of discovering an imposture, as
 he was contemporary and on the spot, but the
 ability to discover it, as he was a man of ge-
 nius, and not over-credulous; his belief, I
 say,

say, would evidently have been no small presumption of the truth of the miracle. How his disbelief can be in like manner a presumption of its truth, is to me incomprehensible. Ay but, rejoins the author, "as he seems not to give any credit to it, he cannot be suspected of any concurrence in the holy fraud." Very well. I am satisfied that a man's TESTIMONY is the *more* to be regarded, that he is above being suspected of concurring in *any* fraud, call it holy or unholy. But I want to know why, on the very same account, his OPINION is *the less* to be regarded. For my part, I find no difficulty in believing every article of the narration for which the cardinal gives his testimony: notwithstanding this, I may be of the same opinion with him; that the account given by the dean and canons, which is their testimony, not his, was all a fiction. But it is not with the cardinal's *testimony* we are here concern'd: about that there is no dispute. It is with his *opinion*. Are then a man's sentiments about a matter of fact, I must insist on it, the less worthy of regard, either because he is a man of genius, and not at all credulous, or because he cannot be suspected of any concurrence in a holy fraud? Are they the more improbable on these accounts? The essayist, when he reflects, will be the last
man

man in the world, that would assist in establishing a maxim so unfavourable, not only to candour, but even to genius and scepticism: and indeed there are few, if any, that would be greater sufferers by it than himself.

But leaving this, as one of the unfathomable depths of the essay, I proceed to the other circumstances. "The miracle," says the author, "of so singular a nature, as could *scarce* admit of a counterfeit." He did well at least to use the word *scarce*; for if every visitant was as little desirous of prying into the secret, as the cardinal, nothing could be more easily counterfeited: "And the witnesses very numerous, and all of them, *in a manner*, spectators of the fact, to which they gave their testimony." By the *very numerous witnesses*, I suppose he means the whole company in town, who were appeal'd to. They were all, *in a manner*, spectators of the fact. What precise abatement the author intended we should make, from the sense of the word *spectators*, on account of the qualifying phrase *in a manner*, I shall not presume to determine; but shall observe, from the memoirs, that it was not so much as pretended by the canons, that any of the citizens had seen the miracle perform'd; 'twas only pretended, that they had seen the man formerly at the gate of the church, wanting a leg. Nor is it alledged,
that

that any of them was at more pains in examining the matter, either before or after the recovery of the leg, than the cardinal was. They were therefore properly no spectators of the fact. The phrase *in a manner*, ought, I imagine, to have been placed in the end of the sentence, which would have run thus : “ to “ which they, *in a manner*, gave their testimony :” for no direct testimony was either asked of them, or given by them ; their belief is inferr’d from their devotion.

I have been the more particular in my remarks on the circumstances of this story, not because there was need of these remarks ; for, tho’ to the essayist the relation appear’d very *memorable*, to me, and, I believe, to most people, it appears very *trifling* ; but that the reader might have this further specimen of the author’s talents in embellishing. To the above-mentioned, and all other such idle tales, this short and simple answer will, by every man of sense, be thought sufficient. *The country where the miracle is said to have been wrought, is SPAIN ; the people who propagated the faith of it, were THE CLERGY.* What comparison, in point of credibility, can be made between miracles, which, with no visible support but their own evidence, had at once to encounter, and did in fact overcome the abhorrence of the priest, and the tyranny of the magistrate,

magistrate, the insolence of the learned, and the bigotry of the superstitious : what comparison, I say, can be made between such, and any prodigies said to have been perform'd in a country, where all the powers of the nation, secular and ecclesiastical, the literature of the schools, such as it is, and the prejudices of the people, conspire in establishing their credit ; a country sunk in the most obdurate superstition that ever disgraced human nature *, a country where the awe of the inquisition

* This perhaps will appear to some to be too severe a censure on a country called Christian, and may be thought to reflect on Christianity itself. I do not think it fairly capable of such a construction. That the corruption of the best things produces the worst, hath grown into a proverb ; and, on the most impartial inquiry, I do not imagine it will be found, that any species of idolatry ever tended so directly to extirpate humanity, gratitude, natural affection, equity, mutual confidence, good faith, and every amiable and generous principle from the human breast, as that gross perversion of the Christian religion which is establish'd in Spain. It might easily be shown, that the human sacrifices offer'd by Heathens, had not half the tendency to corrupt the heart, and consequently deserve not to be view'd with half the horror, as those celebrated among the Spaniards, with so much pomp, and barbarous festivity, at an *auto da fe*. It will not

P

surely

quisition is so great, that no person, whatever be his sentiments, dares mutter a syllable against any opinion that hath obtain'd the patronage of their spiritual guides? But that I may not be accus'd of prepossession, or suspected of exaggerating, I shall only give the sentiments of two eminent foreigners (who were not Protestants, and may therefore be suppos'd the more impartial) concerning that nation, and the influence which the holy tribunal has both on their character and manners. Voltaire *, speaking of the inquisition as establish'd in Spain, says, " Their form of proceeding is an infallible way to destroy " whomsoever the inquisitors please. The " prisoners are not confronted with the in- " formers; and there is no informer who is

surely be affirm'd, that our Saviour reflected on the Mosaic institution, or genuine Judaism, when he said, *Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, YE MAKE him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.* Yet the words plainly imply, that even Pagans, by being converted to the Judaism that was then professed, were made children of hell, and consequently corrupted, instead of being reform'd. See Matth. xxiii. 15.

* Essai sur l'histoire générale, chap. 118.

" not

"not listen'd to. A public criminal, an in-
 "famous person, a child, a prostitute, are
 "creditable accusers. Even the son may de-
 "pose against his father ; the wife against
 "her husband. In fine, the prisoner is com-
 "pell'd to inform against himself, to divine,
 "and to confess, the crime laid to his charge ;
 "of which often he is ignorant. This proce-
 "dure, unheard of till the institution of this
 "court, makes the whole kingdom tremble.
 "Suspicion reigns in every breast. Friendship
 "and openness are at an end. The brother
 "dreads his brother, the father his son.
 "Hence taciturnity is become the character-
 "istic of a nation endued with all the vivacity
 "natural to the inhabitants of a warm and
 "fruitful climate. To this tribunal we must
 "likewise impute that profound ignorance of
 "sound philosophy, in which Spain lies bu-
 "ried, whilst Germany, England, France,
 "and even Italy, have discover'd so many
 "truths, and enlarged the sphere of our
 "knowledge. Never is human nature so de-
 "based, as when ignorance is armed with
 "power." " 'Tis necessary," says Mont-
 "squieu *, in the humble remonstrance to the

* De l' esprit des loix, liv. 25. chap. 13.

inquisitors of Spain and Portugal, “that we
“advertise you of one thing; ’tis, that if any
“person, in future times, shall dare assert,
“that, in the age wherein we live, the Euro-
“peans were civilized, you will be quoted
“to prove that they were barbarians, and
“the idea people will form of you, will be
“such as will dishonour your age, and bring
“hatred on all your contemporaries.”

I COME now to consider the miracles said
to have been perform’d in the church yard
of Saint Medard, at the tomb of *Abbé Paris*.
On these the author hath expatiated with
great parade, exulting, that he hath found in
them, as he imagines, what, in respect of num-
ber, and nature, and evidence, may outvie
the miracles of holy writ. Yet should we
admit them to be true, how they can be con-
sider’d as proofs of any doctrine, or how
they can affect the evidence of the miracles
recorded in scripture, ’twill not perhaps be
easy to discover. But setting that question a-
side, I propose to examine their evidence;
and that, not by entering into a particular in-
quiry concerning each separate fact mention’d
in *Montgeron’s* collection, as such an inquiry
would appear, to every judicious reader, both
tedious and impertinent; but by making a
few general observations, founded in unque-
stionable

stionable fact, and mostly supported even by the authority of Montgeron, that doughty champion of the Jansenist saint *.

First, Let it be remarked, that it was often objected by the enemies of the saint, and scarce contradicted, never confuted, by his friends, that the prostrations at his sepulchre *produced* more diseases, than they *cur'd*. The ingenious author lately quoted, in the account he gives of the affairs of the church in the ninth century, taking occasion incidentally to mention the miracles of the *Abbé*, speaks of this circumstance, as a thing universally known, and undeniable †. “ I should not take notice,” says he, “ of an epidemical folly with which the people of Dijon were seized in 844, occasion'd by one Saint Benignus, who threw those into convulsions who prayed on his tomb; I should not, I say, mention this popular superstition, had it not been furiously reviv'd in our days, in parallel circumstances. It seems, as if the same follies were destin'd to make their ap-

* The character of his book is very justly and very briefly expressed in *Le siècle de Louis XIV.* in these words: “ Si ce livre subsistait un jour, et que les autres fussent perdus, la posterité croirait que notre siècle a été un tems de barbarie,” *chap. 33.*

† *Essai sur l'histoire générale, chap. 21.*

“pearance, from time to time, on the theatre
“of the world : but good sense is also the
“same at all times ; and nothing so judicious
“hath been said, concerning the modern mi-
“racles wrought on the tomb of I know not
“what deacon at Paris, as what a bishop of
“Lyons said, concerning those of Dijon. *A*
“*strange saint indeed, that maims those who pay*
“*their devoirs to him. I should think, miracles*
“*ought to be perform’d for the curing, and*
“*not for the inflicting of maladies.”*

The *second* observation is, That the instances of persons cur’d are extremely *few*, compar’d with the multitudes of people in distress, who night and day attended the sepulchre, imploring in vain the intercession of the saint. The crowds of sick and infirm, who flocked to the tomb for relief, were, by all accounts, innumerable : whereas all the cures which the zealous and indefatigable Montgeron could procure vouchers of, amounted only to NINE *.

The

* It must be owned that the author of the *Recueil* after mentioned, hath presented us with a much greater number ; but let it be remarked, that that author doth not confine himself to the cures perform’d only at the tomb of the *deacon* ; he gives us also those that were wrought in the private chambers of the sick, by virtue of his relics, by images of him, or by earth

The author therefore must be understood, as speaking with great latitude, when he says, "There surely never was so great a number of "miracles ascrib'd to one person, as those "which were lately said to have been wrought "in France, upon the tomb of *Abbé Paris*, "the famous Jansenist, with whose sanctity "the people were so long deluded *." If *thousands* of diseased persons had applied for medicine to some ignorant quack, in the assurance of his extraordinary abilities; would it be matter of surprise to a reasonable man, that, of so many, *eight* or *nine* should be found, whose distempers had taken a favourable turn, whilst they were using his specifics, and had thereby given countenance to the delusion? I think it would be matter of surprise that there were so few.

I shall observe, *thirdly*, That *imposture* was actually detected, and proved in several instances. That the reader may be satisfied of this, I must intreat him to have recourse to the Archbishop of Sens' *Pastoral instruction*; a book which Mr Hume could not, with propriety, take any notice of, having positively

earth brought from under his monument. Nor is the collection restricted only to the cures effected by the saint; it includes also the judgments inflicted by him.

* P. 195.

asserted,

asserted, that “the enemies to those opinions, “in whose favour the miracles were said to “have been wrought, were never able distinctly to refute or detect them *.” This prelate, on the contrary, hath not only given a distinct refutation of some of these pretended miracles, but hath clearly detected the deceit and little artifices by which their credit was supported. I intend not to descend to particulars, and shall therefore only refer the reader to the book itself, and beg that he will peruse what relates to the cases of *Jacques Laurent Menedrieux*, *Jean Nivet*, *Sieur le Doulx*, *Laleu*, *Anne Coulon*, the widow *de Lorme*, as well as *Mademoiselle le Franc*, of whom the essayist hath made mention in a note. In this perusal, the reader will observe the shameful prevarications of some Jansenist witnesses, for whom Mr Hume would fain apologize, by telling us pleasantly, they were *tamper’d with* †. I shall only add on this head, that the detection of fraud in some instances, justly brings suspicion on all the other instances. A man whom I know to have lied to me, on several occasions, I shall suspect, on every occasion, where I have not access to discover, whether what he affirms

* p. 195.

† p. 197. in the note.

be true or false. It is in the same way we judge of the spirit and conduct of parties, as of individuals.

I observe, *fourthly*, That all the cures recorded by Montgeron, as duly attested, were such as might have been effected by *natural* means. There are two kinds of miracles, to which Mr Hume hath alluded in a note, tho' he does not directly make the distinction. One is, when the event, consider'd by itself, is evidently *preternatural*. Of this kind are, raising the dead, walking on water, making whole the maimed; for by no natural causes can these effects be produced. The other kind is, when the event, consider'd by itself, is *natural*, that is, may be produced by natural causes, but is denominated miraculous, on account of the manner. That a sick person should be restor'd to health, is not, when consider'd singly, preternatural; but that health should be restor'd by the command of a man, undoubtedly is. Let us hear the author on this point: "Sometimes an event may not, "*in itself, seem* to be contrary to the laws of "nature, and yet, if it were real, it might, "by reason of some circumstances, be denominated a miracle; because, *in fact*, it is "contrary to these laws. Thus, if a person "claiming a divine authority, should command a sick person to be well, a healthful
"man

“ man to fall down dead, the clouds to pour
 “ rain, the winds to blow, in short, should
 “ order many natural events, which immediate-
 “ ly follow upon his command; these might
 “ justly be esteemed miracles, because they
 “ are really, in this case, contrary to the laws
 “ of nature. For if any suspicion remain,
 “ that the event and command concurr’d by
 “ accident, there is no miracle, and no trans-
 “ gression of the laws of nature. If this su-
 “ spicion be remov’d, there is evidently a mi-
 “ racle, and a transgression of these laws; be-
 “ cause nothing can be more contrary to na-
 “ ture, than that the voice or command of a
 “ man, should have such an influence *.” From
 what hath been said, it appears, that these
 two kinds of miracles must differ considerably
 in respect of evidence, since the latter natu-
 rally gives room for a suspicion, which is ab-
 solutely excluded from the former. In the
 former, when the fact or event is prov’d, the
 miracle is unquestionable. In the latter, the
 fact may be prov’d, and yet the miracle may
 be justly question’d. It therefore merits our
 attention, that all the miracles recorded in
 Montgeron’s collection, were of the second
 kind. One of the most considerable of those
 cures, was that of Don Alphonso de Palacios,

* p. 181. in the note.

who had lost one eye, and was distressed with an inflammation in the other. The inflamed eye was cured, but the lost eye was not restored. Had there been a reproduction of the member which had perished, a sufficient proof of the fact, would have been a sufficient proof of the miracle. But as the case was otherwise, the fact vouch'd may be admitted, without admitting any miracle. The cures said to have been perform'd on those patients who were afflicted with paralytic or dropfical disorders, or that perform'd on Louisa Coirin, who had a tumour on her breast, will not appear to be intitled to a rank in the first class. As little can the cure of Peter Gautier claim that honour. One of his eyes had been prick'd with an awl; in consequence of which the aqueous humour dropped out, and he became blind of that eye. His sight was restor'd, whilst he paid his addressee to the *Abbé*. But that a puncture in the cornea of the eye will often heal of itself, and that the aqueous humour, after it hath been quite lost, will be recruited, and consequently, that the faculty of vision will, in such a case, be recover'd, is what every oculist can assure us of. The loss of the watery humour, is the constant effect of a very common operation in surgery, couching the cataract. Hence we may learn, how we ought to understand these words

words of the author, "The curing of the
 "sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight
 "to the blind, were every where talked of,
 "as the usual effects of that holy sepulchre *."
 As therefore the alledged miracles were all of
 the second class, 'tis only from the attendant
 circumstances we can judge, whether the
 facts, tho' acknowledged, were miraculous
 or not.

In order to enlighten us on this point, I
 observe, *fifthly*, That *none* of the cures were
instantaneous. We have not indeed the same
 hold of the deceased *Abbé*, as of a living pro-
 phet, who pretends to work miracles. Those
 who attend the latter, can know exactly, to
 whom he grants the benefit of his miraculous
 aid. They can judge also, whether the sup-
 plicant's recovery be coincident, with the pro-
 phet's volition or command. In the former
 case, we have not access to judge of either;
 and consequently, there is much greater scope
 for fancy and credulity to operate. No voice
 was ever said to have proceeded from the
 tomb of the blessed deacon, as his votaries
 styled him. They obtained no audible answer
 to their prayers. There are however some
 circumstances, by which a probable con-
 jecture may be made concerning the efficiency

* p. 195.

of the saint in the cures ascrib'd to him. One is, if the cure instantaneously follow'd the first devotions at the tomb. Supernatural cures differ, in this particular, as much as in any other, from those which are effected by natural means, that they are not *gradually*, but *instantly*, perfected. Now of which kind were the cures of St Medard ? From the accounts that are given, 'tis evident, that they were *gradual*. That some of them were *sudden*, is alledged ; but that any of them were *instantaneous*, or immediately follow'd the first application, is not even pretended. All the worshippers at the tomb, persisted for *days*, several of them for *weeks*, and some for *months* successively, daily imploring the intercession of the *Abbé*, before they receiv'd relief from their complaints ; and the relief which was receiv'd, is, in most cases, acknowledged to have been gradual.

I observe, *sixthly*, That most of the devotees either had been using *medicines* before, and continued to use them, during their applications to the saint ; or, that their distempers had *abated*, before they determin'd to solicit his help. That the Spanish youth had been using, all the while, a medicine prescrib'd by an eminent oculist, was prov'd by the depositions of witnesses ; that Gautier had begun to recover his sight, before he had re-

Q

course

course to the sepulchre, was attested, not only by his uncle, but even by himself, when, as the Archbishop of Sens informs us, he sign'd a recantation of what he had formerly advanced. With regard to the rest, it appears at least probable, from the circumstances of the proof, that they were using the prescriptions of the physicians, whom they had consulted before applying to the deacon, and who were afterwards requir'd to give their testimony, concerning the nature and malignancy of the different diseases.

The *seventh* observation is, That some of the cures attested were *incomplete*. This was manifestly the case of the Spaniard, who was reliev'd only from the most inconsiderable part of his complaint. Even the cure of *Mademoiselle Thibault*, which was as great a subject of exultation to the partisans of the *Abbé* as any other, was not complete. Not only was she confin'd to her bed, for many days, after the decrease of her dropsy; but she still remain'd incapable of moving two of her fingers. Silva, physician to the Duke of Orleans, attested this; adding expressly, that he *could not look on her as being cur'd*.

The *eighth* and last observation I shall make on this subject is, That the relief granted some of them was but *temporary*. This was clearly prov'd to be the case of the Spanish gentleman,

man. That soon after his return home, he relapsed into his former malady, the prelate I have often quoted, hath, by the certificates and letters which he procur'd from Madrid, put beyond controversy. Among these, there are letters from a Spanish grandee, Don Francis Xavier, and from the patient's uncle, besides a certificate signed by himself.

After the above observations, I believe, there will be no occasion for saying much on this subject. The author has, in a note, artfully enough pointed out his aim, that it might not be overlook'd by the careless reader *. "There is another book," says he, "in three volumes, (called, *Recueil des miracles de l'Abbé Paris*) giving an account of "many of these miracles, and accompanied "with prefatory discourses, which are very "well wrote †." He adds, "There runs, "however,

* p. 196.

† I am surpris'd that Mr Hume hath taken no notice of the profound erudition display'd in the *Recueil*, as I imagine its author is much more eminent for this, than for his talent in writing. Besides, his learning deserves our regard the more, that it is of a kind rarely to be met with in the present century. Where shall we find in these dregs of the ages, to adopt his own emphatical expression, such an extensive knowledge, as he hath exhibited, of all the monkish and

“however, thro’ the whole of these, a ridiculous comparison betwixt the miracles of
“our

legendary writings of the darkeſt and moſt barbarous, or, according to him, the moſt devout ages of the church? Or whence elſe, but from thoſe productions, could he have ſelected ſuch admirable materials for his work? The lives and writings of the ſaints are an inexhauſtible treaſure for a performance of this kind. ’Tis true, St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke, and St John, have ſaid little to his purpoſe, and he makes as little uſe of them. But is not this want richly ſupplied in St Cudbert, St Edildride, St Wilibrord, St Baudri, and five hundred others of equal note? One thing however I would gladly be informed of, being utterly at a loſs to account for it. What intitled this author, who ſeems not to be deficient in a veneration truly catholic for ignorance, ſuperſtition, and barbariſm, to ſpeak contemptibly of Capgravius, Colganus, and Jacobus de Voragine author of *The golden legend*? To be plain with him, this is a freedom which doth not at all become him: for of *the few* readers in this age, who happen to be acquainted with the authorities quoted in the *Recueil*, moſt, if not all, will, I’m afraid, be of opinion, that the writers laſt mentioned are fully as credible, not leſs famous, and much more ingenious, than many of thoſe to whom he is ſo greatly indebted for his moſt extraordinary narrative. Was it for him then to ſcandalize *theſe few*? ’Tis pity that a writer of ſuch uncommon reading and application,
ſhould

“ our Saviour and those of the *Abbé* ; where-
 “ in ’tis asserted, that the evidence for the
 “ latter

should act so inconsistently, and undermine his own cause. But passing his literature, which is unquestionable, I shall give the reader a specimen of his talent in disputation. To the objection that had been made, that the miracles of the deacon were gradual, he replies, “ So was *the creation*, the first of miracles, which employ’d no less than six days.” As all that was done in that time, is comprehended under *one name*, THE CREATION, he concludes very sagely, that it ought to be denominated *one miracle*. A writer of this stamp would no doubt despise the answer which an ordinary reader might make him,—*first*, That every single production was a perfect miracle,—*secondly*, That nothing could be more instantaneous than those productions, *God said, Let there be light, and there was light, &c.*—and *lastly*, That the world was not created by the ministration of man, nor in the presence of men, nor in order to serve as evidence of any doctrine. I must be forgiven to remark, that in the whole of this author’s reply, he hath unfortunately mistaken the meaning of the objectors, who intend not to say, that God may not perform a miracle gradually, but that what is so perform’d, hath not the same evidence of its being miraculous, as what is done in an instant, and therefore cannot so well serve as evidence of any doctrine. Now that the miracles of Monsieur de Paris were intended as evidence of his doctrine,

“latter is equal to that for the former *.”
 At first reading, one is apt, with surprise, to
 imagine,

and consequently of that of the appellants from the bull *Unigenitus*, he every where vehemently maintains. Another specimen of this author's acuteness and ingenuity I shall give in a literal translation from his own words. “But, it will be said, in the earliest times of the church, miraculous cures were commonly perfected in an instant. True; and ‘tis this which confirms my doctrine. As it was ordinary then, to convert great sinners all of a sudden, ’twas also ordinary to cure the sick all of a sudden. But such wonders in both kinds are for the commencement of the church, or for the renovation promis’d her. In these days, which the French clergy have justly styled *the dregs of the ages*, ’tis much that God convert many sinners, and cure many sick, by slow degrees, at the same time that he shows by some more shining examples, that his arm is not shortened.”

* I am sorry to be again so soon laid under the necessity of observing, that the essayist, by confiding too much in his memory, often injures the writers whom he quotes. It is but doing justice to the author of the *Recueil*, to observe, that he hath, in no part of his performance, asserted that the evidence for the miracles of Monsieur de Paris is equal to that for the miracles of Jesus Christ. Perhaps my reader will be surpris’d when I tell him, for I own I was exceedingly surpris’d when I discover’d, that he
 hath

imagine, that the author is going to make some atonement for the tenets of the essay,
by

hath not only in the plainest terms asserted, but strenuously maintain'd, the contrary. And for this purpose he hath employ'd no less than twelve pages of his work. He introduces the subject (Discourse 2. part 1.) with observing, that he and the rest of his party had been traduced by their adversaries, as equalling the miracles of the deacon to those of our Saviour. The impiety of such a comparison he even mentions with horror, and treats the charge as an absolute calumny. Hence he takes occasion to enumerate those peculiar circumstances in the miracles of our Lord, which gave them an eminent superiority, not only over those of his saint, but over those of every other saint, or prophet whatsoever. To this enumeration he subjoins, *Tous ceux qui recourent à Monsieur de Paris ne sont pas guéris, nous dit-on; plusieurs ne le sont qu'en partie, ou d'une manière lente, et moins éclatante; il n'a point ressuscité de morts. Que s'ensuit-il de-la, sinon que les miracles que Dieu a opérés par lui sont inférieurs à ceux que nôtre Seigneur a opérés par lui-même? Nous l'avouons, nous inculquons cette vérité.* "All those, we are told, who recur to Monsieur de Paris are not cured; several are cured but in part, or in a slow and less striking manner; he hath raised no dead. What follows, unless that the miracles which God wrought by him, are inferior to those which our Lord wrought by himself? We acknowledge;
" we

by turning advocate for the miracles of Jesus Christ; and by showing, that these are not affected

“ we inculcate this truth.” Afterwards, speaking of evidence, he owns also, that the miracles of the deacon are not equally certain with those of Jesus Christ. The latter, he says, are more certain in many respects. He specifies the natural notoriety of some of the facts, the public and instantaneous manner in which most of them were effected, the number, the quality, the constancy of the witnesses, and the forced acknowledgment of his most spiteful enemies. He concludes this subject in these memorable terms. *Au reste ce que je viens d’exposer sur la supériorité des merveilles opérés par le Sauveur, je l’avois reconnu avec plaisir dans le premier discours. J’y ai dit en propres termes, qu’il y avoit une différence infinie entre les miracles de Jesus Christ et ceux de Monsieur de Paris. J’ai promis de ne jamais oublier cette différence, et j’ai tenu parole. J’ai remarqué, dans le lieu où il convenoit de le faire, que cette différence infinie regardoit l’evidence des prodiges aussi bien que leur grandeur ; et que les incredulés pouvoient nous dire, que ceux que nous produisions n’ont point le même éclat qu’ont eu ceux de nôtre Seigneur.* “ Finally what I have just now evinced on the superiority of the wonders performed by our Lord, I had acknowledged with pleasure in the first discourse. I said there in express terms, that there was an infinite difference between the miracles of Jesus Christ and those of Monsieur de Paris. I promised never to forget this difference, and I have kept my promise. I re-
 “ marked

affected by his doctrine. But on this point we are not long held in suspense. He subjoins, "As, if the testimony of men could
 " ever be put in the balance with that of God
 " himself, who conducted the pen of the inspired writers." An ingenious piece of raillery without question. Is it possible, in a politer manner, or in more obliging terms, to tell the Christian world, *They are fools*; and that all who are silly enough to believe the miracles recorded in scripture, are not intitled

" marked in its proper place, that this infinite difference regarded the *evidence* as well as the *greatness* of the prodigies; and that the incredulous might object, that those which we produce, have
 " not the same lustre with those of our Saviour." I have been the more particular on this point, not so much to vindicate the author of the *Recueil*, as to show the sense which even the most bigotted partizans of the holy deacon had of the difference between the miracles ascribed to him, and those performed by our Lord. I cannot avoid remarking also another difference, I mean that which appears between the sentiments of this author as expressed by himself, and his sentiments as reported by the essayist. 'Tis indeed, Mr Hume, a judicious observation you have given us; that we ought to 'lend a very academic faith to every report which favours the passion of the reporter; in whatever way it strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities.' p. 200.

to be argued with as *men*. How? They are so absurd as to believe the scriptures to be the word of God, on the evidence of the miracles wrought by our Lord and his apostles; and that these miracles were wrought, they could not believe on any testimony, less than that of God, reporting them in the scriptures; and thus, by making inspiration and miracles reciprocally foundations to each other, they, in effect, admit both without any foundation at all. After this handsome compliment to the friends of holy writ, he thinks himself at liberty to be very explicit on the comparative evidence of the miracles of the *Abbé*, and those of Jesus: "If these writers indeed were" to be consider'd merely as human testimony, "the French author is *very moderate* in his" comparison; since he might, *with some appearance of reason*, pretend, that the *Jansenist* miracles *much surpass* the other, in "evidence and authority." Was ever so rough an assault preceded by so smooth, but so insidious a preamble? Is it then still the fate of Jesus to be betrayed with a kiss? But notwithstanding this author's declaration, no Christian will have reason to dread the issue of the comparison. Mr Hume hath not enter'd on particulars, neither shall I enter on them. I should not incline to tire my reader with repetitions, which, in a minute inquiry, would
be

be inevitable. I shall therefore only desire him, if he think it needful, to peruse a second time the eight foregoing observations. Let him try the miracles of our Lord by this touch-stone; and I persuade myself, he will be satisfied, that there is *no appearance of reason* to pretend, that the Jansenist miracles *much surpass* the other, or even equal them, in evidence and authority.

The author triumphs not a little in the observation, that the reports of the prodigies perform'd by the deacon, were violently oppos'd by the civil magistrate, and by the Jesuits, the most learned society in the kingdom. He could see the importance of this circumstance in the case of *Abbé Paris*, tho' not in the case of Jesus Christ. But that the difference of the cases, as well as their resemblance, may better appear; it ought likewise to be observed, that Jansenism, tho' not the *ruling* faction, was at that time the *popular* faction; that this popularity was not the effect of the miracles of the *Abbé*, but antecedent to these miracles; that, on the contrary, the Jesuits were extremely *unpopular*; and that many, who had no more faith in the miracles of Saint Medard than Mr Hume hath, were well pleas'd to connive at a delusion, which at once plagued and mortified a body of men, that were become almost universally odious.

I shall only add, that nothing could more effectually expose the folly of those pretensions, than the expedient by which they were made to cease. In consequence of an order from the King, the sepulchre was inclosed with a wall, and the votaries were debarr'd from approaching the tomb. The author says in relation to this *, " No Jansenist was ever em-
 " barras'd to account for the cessation of the
 " miracles, when the churchyard was shut up
 " by the King's edict." Certain it is, that
 " God is master of his own graces and works." But it is equally certain, that neither reason nor the gospel leads us to think, that any human expedient will prove successful, which is calculated to frustrate the decrees of Heaven. Both, on the contrary, teach us, that men never more directly *promote* the designs of their maker, than when they intend directly to *oppose* them. It was not thus, that either Pharisees or Sadducees, Jews or Gentiles, succeeded in their opposition to the miracles of Jesus and his apostles. The opinion of Gamaliel † was undoubtedly judicious : *If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought ; but if it be of God, ye CANNOT overthrow it ; beware therefore, lest ye be found fighting even a-*

* p. 198. in the note.

† Acts v. 38. 39.

gainst God. To conclude, Did the Janfenist caufe derive any advantage from thofe pretended miracles? None at all. It even fuffer'd by them. It is juftly remarked by Voltaire *, that “the tomb of the deacon Paris, prov'd “in effect, in the minds of all people of fenfe, “the tomb of Janfenifm.” How unlike in all refpects the miracles recorded by the Evangelifts!

THUS I have briefly inquir'd into the nature and evidence, firft of the *Pagan*, and next of the *Popifh* miracles, mentioned by Mr Hume; and have, I hope, fufficiently evinced, that the miracles of the New Testament can fuffer nothing by the comparifon; that, on the contrary, as, in painting, the fhades ferve to heighten the glow of the colours; and, in mufic, the difcords to fet off the fweetnefs of the harmony; fo the value of thefe genuine miracles is enhanced by the contrast of thofe paltry counterfeits.

* Siecle de Louis XIV. chap. 33.

SECTION. VI.

Abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been miracles in former times; or such events as, when compar'd with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr Hume be denominated miraculous.

I READILY concur with Mr Hume in maintaining, that when, merely by the force of REASON, we attempt to investigate the *origin of worlds**, we get beyond our sphere, and must infallibly bewilder ourselves in hypothesis and conjecture. REASON indeed (which vainly boasts her all-sufficiency) hath sometimes pretended to carry men to this amazing height. But there is ground to suspect, that, in such instances, the ascent of *reason*, as the author elegantly expresseth it†, hath been aided by the wings of *imagination*. If we will not be indebted to REVELATION, for our knowledge of this article, we must,

* Essay 12. Of the academical or sceptical philosophy, part 3.

† Essay 11. Of a particular providence and future state.

for aught I can perceive, be satisfied to live in ignorance. There is, however, one question distinct from the former, tho' akin to it, which, even from the principles of reason, we may with great probability determine. The question I mean is, Whether the world had an origin or not ?

That there hath been an infinite, eternal, and independent series of finite, successive, and dependent beings, such as men, and consequently that the world had no beginning, appears, from the bare consideration of the thing, extremely incredible, if not altogether absurd. The abstract argument us'd on this head, might appear too metaphysical and refin'd : I shall not therefore introduce it ; but shall recur to topics, which are more familiar, and which, tho' they do not demonstrate, that it is absolutely impossible that *the world hath existed from eternity*, clearly evince, that it is highly improbable, or rather, certainly false. These topics I shall only mention, as they are pretty obvious, and have been often urged with great energy by the learned, both ancient and modern. Such are, the late invention of letters, and of all the sciences and arts by which human life is civilized ; the known origin of most nations, states and kingdoms ; and the first peopling of many countries. 'Tis in our power at present to

trace the history of every people backwards to times of the greatest barbarity and ignorance. Europe, tho' not the largest of the four parts into which the earth is divided, is, on many accounts, the most considerable. But what a different face doth Europe wear at present, from what it wore three thousand years ago? How immense the odds in knowledge, in arts, in policy, in every thing? How easy is the intercourse, and how extensive the acquaintance, which men can now enjoy with all, even the remotest regions of the globe, compar'd with what was, or could have been enjoy'd, in that time of darkness and simplicity? A man differs not more from a child, than the human race now differs from the human race then. Three thousand years ago, appear indeed to mark a very distant epoch; and yet it is but as yesterday, compar'd with eternity. This, when duly weighed, every thinking person will acknowledge to be as strong moral evidence, as the subject can admit, (and that I imagine is very strong) that the world had a beginning.

I shall make a supposition, which will perhaps appear whimsical, but which will tend to elucidate the argument I am enforcing. In antediluvian times, when the longevity of man was such as to include some centuries, I shall suppose, that a few boys had been transport-
ed

ed to a desert island, and there left together, just old enough to make shift to sustain themselves, as those in the golden age are fabled to have done, on acorns, and other spontaneous productions of the soil. I shall suppose, that they had lived there for some hundreds of years, had remember'd nothing of their coming into the island, nor of any other person whatsoever; and that thus they had never had access to know, or hear, of either birth, or death. I shall suppose them to enter into a serious disquisition concerning their own duration, the question having been started, Whether they had existed from eternity, or had once begun to be? They recur to memory: but memory can furnish them with nothing certain or decisive. If it must be allowed, that it contains no trace of a beginning of existence, it must also be allow'd, that it reaches not beyond a few centuries at most. They observe besides, concerning this faculty, that the further back it goes, it becomes the more indistinct, terminating at last in confusion and darkness. Some things however they distinctly recollect, and are assured of. They remember, they were once of much lower stature, and of smaller size; they had less bodily strength; and all their mental faculties were weaker. They know, that, in the powers both of body and of mind, they have

advanced, by imperceptible degrees, to the pitch they are now arrived at. These considerations, especially when fortified by some analogous observations they might have made, on the growth of herbs and trees, would have shown the probability to be entirely on the side of those who asserted, that their existence had a beginning : And tho', on account of the narrow sphere of their knowledge and experience, the argument could not have appear'd to them in all its strength, we, from our larger acquaintance with nature, even abstracting from our knowledge of man in particular, must be satisfied, that it would have been strictly analogical and just. Exactly *similar*, the very *same*, I should rather say, is the argument I have been urging for the origination of the species. Make but a few alterations in phraseology; for *memory*, substitute *history and tradition*; for *hundreds* of years, say *thousands*; for *the powers of body and mind*, put *the arts and sciences*; and, with these, and perhaps one or two more such variations, you will find the argument as applicable in the one case, as in the other. Now, if it be granted, that the human species must have had a beginning, it will hardly be question'd, that every other animal species, or even that the universe, must have had a beginning.

BUT

BUT in order to prove the proposition laid down in the title of this section, 'tis not necessary to suppose, that the world had a beginning. Admit it had not, and observe the consequence. Thus much must be admitted also, that not barely for a *long continued*, but for an ETERNAL, succession of generations, mankind were in a state little superior to the beasts; that of a sudden, there came a most astonishing change upon the species; that they exerted talents and capacities, of which there appear'd not the smallest vestige, during the eternity preceding; that they acquir'd such knowledge as procur'd them a kind of empire, not only over the vegetable and animal worlds, but even, in some respect, over the elements, and all the unwieldy powers of matter; that, in consequence of this, they were quickly rais'd, much more above the state they had been formerly and eternally in, than such their former and eternal state was above that of the brute creation. If such a revolution in nature, such a thorough, general, and sudden change as this, would not be denominated miraculous, 'tis not in my power to conceive what would I could not esteem it a greater miracle, hardly so great, that any species of beasts, which have hitherto been doom'd to tread the earth, should now get wings, and float about in the air.

Nor

Nor will this plea be subverted by that trite objection, That mankind may have been as much enlighten'd, perhaps myriads of years ago, as they are at present; but that by some *universal* calamity, such as deluge or conflagration, which, after the rotation of many centuries, the earth possibly becomes liable to, all traces of erudition and of science, all traces both of the elegant and of the useful arts, may have been effaced, and the human race, springing from a few who had escap'd the common ruin, may have emerged anew, out of barbarity and ignorance. This hypothesis doth but substitute one miracle in the place of another. Such general disorder is entirely unconformable to our experience of the course of nature. Accordingly the destruction of the world by a deluge, the author hath number'd among those prodigies, or miracles, which render the Pentateuch perfectly incredible.

IF, on the contrary, we admit, that the world had a beginning, (and will not every thinking person acknowledge, that this position is much more probable than the contrary?) the production of the world must be ascrib'd either to *chance*, or to *intelligence*.

Shall we derive all things, spiritual and corporeal, from a principle so insignificant as
blind

blind *chance* ? Shall we say, with Epicurus, that the fortuitous concourse of rambling atoms hath rear'd this beautiful and stupendous fabric ? In that case, perhaps, we should give an account of the origin of things, which, most people will think, could not properly be styl'd miraculous. But is it, because the formation of a grand and regular system in this way, is conformable to the experienced order of nature ? Quite the reverse. Nothing can be more repugnant to universal experience, than that the least organic body, not to mention the glorious frame of nature, should be produced by such a casual jumble. It has therefore, in the highest degree possible, that particular quality of miracles, from which, according to the author's theory, their incredibility results, and may doubtless, in this loose acceptation of the word, be term'd *miraculous*. But should we affirm, that, to account thus for the origin of the universe, is to account for it by miracle ; we should be thought, I'm afraid, to speak both weakly and improperly. There is something here, if I may so express myself, which is far beyond the miraculous ; something, for which I know not whether any language can afford a proper appellation, unless it be the general appellations of *absurdity* and *nonsense*.

Shall we then at last recur to the common doctrine,

doctrine, that the world was produced by an *intelligent cause*? On this supposition also, tho' incomparably the most rational, it is evident, that in the creation, formation, or first production of things, call it by what name you please, a power must have been exerted, which, in respect of the present course of nature, may be styled *miraculous*. I intend not to dispute about a word, nor to inquire, whether that term can, in strict propriety, be us'd of any exertions before the establishment of the laws of nature. I use the word in the same latitude, in which the author commonly useth it in his reasoning, for every event, that is not conformable to that course of nature with which we are acquainted by experience.

WHETHER, therefore, the world *had*, or *had not*, a *beginning*; whether, on the *first* supposition, the production of things be ascrib'd to *chance*, or to *design*; whether, on the *second*, in order to solve the numberless objections that arise, *we do*, or *do not*, recur to universal *catastrophes*; there is no possibility of accounting for the phenomena that presently come under our notice, without having at last recourse to MIRACLES; that is, to events altogether unconformable, or, if you will, contrary to the present course of nature known to us by experience. I cannot conceive

ceive an hypothesis, which is not reducible to one or other of those above mentioned. Whoever imagines, that another might be framed, which is not comprehended in any of those, and which hath not as yet been devis'd by any system-builder ; let him make the experiment, and I will venture to prognosticate, that he will still find himself clogged with the same difficulty. The conclusion therefore above deduced, may be justly deem'd, till the contrary is shown, to be not only the result of one, but alike of every hypothesis, of which the subject is susceptible.

THUS it hath been evinced, as was propos'd, that abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been, that there must have been, *miracles* in former times, or such events, as, when compar'd with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr Hume be denominated miraculous.

SECTION

SECTION VII.

Revisal of Mr Hume's examination of the Pentateuch.

ALLOWING to the conclusion deduced in the foregoing section its proper weight, I shall also take into consideration the *Pentateuch*, or five books of Moses; or rather, I shall endeavour impartially to revise the examination which those books have already undergone by the essayist *. It is, in this case, of the greatest importance to know, whether the evidence on both sides hath been fairly stated.

“ HERE then we are first to consider a “book,” which is acknowledged, on all hands, to be the most ancient record in the world, “presented to us,” we admit, “by a barbarous and ignorant people †,” at the same time exhibiting

* p. 205.

† The author adds, “wrote in an age, when “they were still more barbarous.” These words I have omitted in the revisal, because they appear to me unintelligible. The age in which the Pentateuch was

exhibiting a system of *Theism*, or natural religion, which is both rational and sublime; with which nothing that was ever compil'd or produced, on this subject, in the most enlighten'd ages, by the most learned and polish'd nations, who were unacquainted with that book, will bear to be compar'd.

Mr Hume himself must allow, that this remark deserves attention, since his reasoning in another performance, which he calls, *The natural history of religion*, would lead us to expect the contrary. He there maintains, that *Polytheism* and *Idolatry* are, and must be, the religion of rude and barbarous, and consequently of ancient ages; that the true principles of *Theism*, or the belief of one almighty and wise being, the creator, the preserver, and the ruler of heaven and earth, results from the greatest improvements of the understanding in philosophy and science. To suppose the contrary, says he, is supposing, that "while men were ignorant and barbarous, they discover'd truth; but fell into error, "as soon as they acquir'd learning and po-

was written, is indirectly compared to another age, he says not what: and all we can make of it is, that this people were more barbarous at that time, than at some other time, nobody knows when.

S

"liteneffs."

“litenefs *.” This reasoning is juſt, wherever religion is to be conſider’d as the reſult of human reflections. What account then will the author give of this wonderful exception? That the reverſe is here the caſe, it is impoſſible for him to diſſemble. The people he himſelf calls ignorant and barbarous; yet they are not idolaters or polytheiſts. At the time when the book, which he examines, was compos’d, he ſeems to think, they even exceeded themſelves in barbarity; yet the ſentiments of theſe barbarians, on the ſubject of religion, the ſentiments which that very book preſents to us, may well put to ſilence the wiſdom of the politeſt nations on the earth. Need I remind Mr Hume of his expreſs declaration, that if a traveller were tranſported into any unknown region, and found the inhabitants “ignorant and barbarous, he might “before hand declare them idolaters, and “there is *ſcarce* a POSSIBILITY of his being “miſtaken †?” I know no ſatisſactory account that can be given of this exception, on the principles of the eſſayiſt. Nevertheless, nothing is more eaſy, than to give a ſatisſactory account of it, on the Chriſtian principles. This account is that which is given by

* Natural hiſtory of religion. I.

† *Ibidem*.

the book itself. It is, that the religious tenets of that nation were not the result of their reasonings, but proceeded from divine revelation. The contrast we discern betwixt the ISRAELITES, and the ancient GREEKS and ROMANS, is remarkable. The GREEKS and ROMANS, on all the subjects of human erudition, on all the liberal and the useful arts, reasoned like *men*; on the subject of religion, they prated like *children*. The ISRAELITES, on the contrary, in all the sciences and arts, were *children*; but, in their notions of religion, they were *men*; in the doctrines, for example, of the unity, the eternity, the omnipotence, the omniscience, the omnipresence, the wisdom, and the goodness of God; in their opinions concerning providence, and the creation, preservation and government of the world; opinions so exalted and comprehensive, as, even by the author's acknowledgment, could never enter into the thoughts of barbarians.

But to proceed in the revival: We have here a book, says the essayist, "wrote in all probability long after the facts it relates." That this book was written long after *some* of the facts it relates, is not indeed denied; that it was written long after *all*, or even *most* of those facts, I see no reason to believe. If Mr Hume meant to signify, by the expression

quoted, that this was in all probability the case, why did he not produce the grounds on which the probability is founded? Shall a bold assertion pass for argument? or can it be expected, that any one should consider reasons, which are only in general suppos'd, but not specified?

He adds, "corroborated by no *concurring* testimony;" as little, say I, invalidated by any *contradicting* testimony; and both, for this plain reason, because there is no human composition, that can be compar'd with this, in respect of antiquity. But tho' this book is not corroborated by the concurrent testimony of any coeval histories, because, if there ever were such histories, they are not now extant; it is not therefore destitute of all collateral evidence. The following examples of this kind of evidence deserve some notice. The division of time into weeks, which hath obtain'd in many countries, for instance among the Egyptians, Chinese, Indians, and northern barbarians; nations whereof some had little or no intercourse with others, and were not even known by name to the Hebrews*: the tradition which in several places prevail'd

* The judicious reader will observe, that there is a great difference between the concurrence of nations, in the division of time into *weeks*, and their concurrence

prevail'd concerning the primeval chaos from which the world arose, the production of all living creatures out of water and earth, by the efficiency of a supreme mind *, the formation

rence in the other periodical divisions, into *years*, *months*, and *days*. These divisions arise from such natural causes, as are every where obvious ; the annual and diurnal revolutions of the sun, and the revolution of the moon. The division into *weeks*, on the contrary, seems perfectly arbitrary : consequently its prevailing in distant countries, among nations which had no communication with one another, affords a strong presumption, that it must have been deriv'd from some tradition (as that of the creation) which hath been older than the dispersion of mankind into different regions. 'Tis easy to conceive, that the practice, in rude and barbarous ages, might remain, thro' habit, when the tradition, on which it was founded, was entirely lost ; 'tis easy to conceive, that afterwards, people addicted to idolatry, or who, like the Egyptians, had become proficient in astronomy, should assign to the different days of the week, the names of their deities, or of the planets.

* This in particular merits our attention the more, that it cannot, by any explication, be made to agree with the doctrine which obtain'd among the Pagans, commonly called *the Mythology*. Ovid is so sensible of this that, when he mentions a deity as the efficient cause of the creation, he leaves him, as it were, detached from those of the popular system, which it

tion of man last of all, in the image of God, and his being vested with dominion over the other

was his business as a poet to deliver, being at a loss what name to give him, or what place in nature to assign him. *Quisquis fuit ille deorum. Whichever of the gods it was.* He well knew that, in all the catalogue of their divinities, the god who made the world was not to be found, that these divinities themselves were, on the contrary, produced out of the chaos, as well as men and beasts. Mr Hume, in his *Natural history of religion*, IV. remarks this conduct in Ovid, and ascribes it to his having lived in a learned age, and having been instructed by philosophers in the principle of a divine formation of the world. For my part, I very much question, whether any nation was ever yet indebted, for this principle, to the disquisitions of philosophers. Had this opinion never been heard of, till the Augustan age, it might indeed have been suspected, that it was the daughter of philosophy and science, but so far is this from being the case, that some vestiges of it may be traced even in the earliest, and most ignorant times. Thales the Milesian, who lived many centuries before Ovid, had, as Cicero, in his first book *De natura deorum*, informs us, attributed the origin of all things to God. Anaxagoras had also denominated the forming principle, which sever'd the elements, created the world, and brought order out of confusion, *intelligence*, or *mind*. It is therefore much more probable that these ancients owed this

other animals, the primitive state of innocence and happiness: the subsequent degeneracy

this doctrine to a tradition handed down from the earliest ages, which even all the absurdities of the theology they had embraced had not been able totally to erase, tho' these absurdities could never be made to coalesce with this doctrine. At the same time I acknowledge, that there is something so noble and so rational in the principle, *That the world was produced by an intelligent cause*, that sound philosophy will ever be ready to adopt it, when once it is propos'd. But that this opinion is not the offspring of philosophy, may be reasonably deduced from this consideration also, that they were not the most enlighten'd or philosophic nations, amongst whom it was maintain'd in greatest purity. I speak not of the Hebrews. Even the Parthians, Medes and Persians, whom the Greeks consider'd as barbarians, were genuine theists, and notwithstanding many superstitious practices which prevail'd among them, they held the belief of one eternal God the creator and the lord of the universe. If this principle is to be deriv'd from the utmost improvement of the mind in ratiocination and science, which is Mr Hume's hypothesis, the phenomenon just now observed is unaccountable. If, on the contrary, it is to be deriv'd originally from revelation, preserv'd by tradition, thro' successive generations, nothing can more easily be accounted for. Traditions are always longest retain'd, and most purely transmitted, in or near the place where

racy of mankind : their destruction by a flood : and the preservation of one family in a vessel. Nay, which is still stronger, I might plead the vestiges of some such catastrophe as

where they were first receiv'd, and amongst a people who possess a strong attachment to their ancient laws and customs. Migrations into distant countries, mixture of different nations, revolutions in government and manners, yea and ingenuity itself, all contribute to corrupt tradition, and do sometimes wholly efface it. This I take to be the only admissible account, why so rational and so philosophical a principle prevail'd most in ages and countries in which reason and philosophy seem'd to be but in their infancy. The notion, that the Greeks borrow'd their opinions on this subject from the books of Moses, a notion for which some Jewish writers, some Christian fathers, and even some moderns have warmly contended, appears void of all foundation. These opinions in Greece, as hath been observed, were of a very early date ; whereas that there existed such a people as the Jews, seems scarce to have been known there till about the time of the Macedonian conquests. No sooner were they known than they were hated, and their laws and customs universally despis'd. Nor is there the shadow of reason to think, that the Greeks knew any thing of the sacred writings till a considerable time afterwards, when that version of them was made into their language which is called *The translation of the Seventy*.

the

the deluge, which the shells and other marine bodies, that are daily dug out of the bowels of the earth, in places remote from the sea, do clearly exhibit to us : I might urge the traces, which still remain in ancient histories, of the migration of people and of science from Asia (which hath not improperly been styled *the cradle of the arts*) into many parts both of Africa and Europe : I might plead the coincidence of those migrations, and of the origin of states and kingdoms, with the time of the dispersion of the posterity of Noah.

But to return : The author subjoins, “ resembling those fabulous accounts, which every nation gives of its origin.” ’Tis unluckily the fate of holy writ with this author, that both its resemblance, and its want of resemblance, to the accounts of other authors, are alike presumptions against it. He hath not indeed told us, wherein it resembles fabulous accounts ; and, for my part, tho’ the charge were just, I should imagine, little or nothing to the disadvantage of the Pentateuch, could be deduced from it. It is universally agreed among the learned, that even the most absurd fables of idolaters, derive their origin from facts, which having been, in barbarous ages, transmitted only by oral tradition, have come at length to be grossly corrupted and disfigur’d. ’Tis nevertheless probable, that
such

such fictions would still retain some striking features of those truths, from which they sprung. And if the books of Moses resemble, in any thing, the fabulous accounts of other nations, it would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that they resemble only whatever is least fabulous in these accounts. That this will be found to be the case, we may reasonably presume, even from what hath been observ'd already; and if so, the resemblance, so far from being an argument against those books, is evidently an argument in their favour. In order to remove any doubt that may remain on this head, it ought to be attended to, that, in a number of concurrent testimonies, (where there could have been no previous concert) there is a probability independent of that which results from our faith in the witnesses; nay, should the witnesses be of such a character as to merit no faith at all. This probability arises from the *concurrence* itself. That such a concurrence should spring from *chance*, is as one to infinite, in other words, morally impossible; if therefore concert be excluded, there remains no other cause but the reality of the fact.

'Tis true, that "upon reading this book, "we find it full of prodigies and miracles:" but 'tis also true, that many of those miracles are such, as the subject it treats of, must unavoidably

voidably make us expect. For a proof of this position, I need but refer the reader to the principles establish'd in the preceding section. No book in the world do we find written in a more simple style; nowhere does there appear in it, the least affectation of ornament; yet nowhere else is the Almighty represented, as either acting or speaking in a manner so becoming the eternal ruler of the world. Compare the account of the CREATION which is given by *Moses*, with the ravings of Sanchoniatho the *Phenician* philosopher, which he hath dignified with the title of COSMOGONY; or compare it with the childish extravagancies of the *Greek* and the *Latin* poets, so justly likened by the author to a *sick man's dreams* *; and then say, whether any person of candour and discernment will not be dispos'd to exclaim in the words of the prophet, *What is the CHAFF to the WHEAT* †! The account is what we should call, in reference to our experience, *miraculous*. But was it possible it should be otherwise? I believe the greatest infidel will not deny, that it is at least as plausible an opinion, that the world had a beginning, as that it had not. If it had, can it be imagin'd by any man in his senses, that that particular quality

* Natural history of religion. XV.

† Jer. xxiii. 28.

should

should be an objection to the narrative, which he previously knows it must have? Must not the first production of things, the original formation of animals and vegetables, require exertions of power, which, in preservation and propagation, can never be exemplified?

It will perhaps be objected, That if the miracles continued no longer, and extended no further, than the necessity of creation requir'd, this reasoning would be just; but that in fact they both continued much longer, and extended much further. The answer is obvious: It is impossible for us to judge, how far the necessity of the case required. Immediately after the creation, things must have been in a state very different from that which they are in at present. How long that state might continue, we have not the means of discovering: but as, in human infancy, 'tis necessary that the feeble creature should, for some time, be carried in the nurse's arms, and afterwards, by the help of leading-strings, be kept from falling, before he acquire strength to walk; 'tis not unlikely, that, in the infancy of the world, such interpositions should be more frequent and requisite, till nature attaining a certain maturity, those laws and that constitution should be established, which we now experience. It will greatly strengthen this conclusion, to reflect, that in every species of
natural

natural productions, with which we are acquainted, we invariably observe a similar feebleness in the individuals on their first appearance, and a similar gradation towards a state of greater perfection and stability. Besides, if we acknowledge the necessity of the exertion of a power, which only in reference to our experience is call'd miraculous ; the question, as is well observ'd by the judicious prelate formerly quoted *, " whether this power stopped
 " immediately, after it had made man, or went
 " on and exerted itself farther, is a question of
 " the same kind, as whether an ordinary power
 " exerted itself in such a particular degree and
 " manner, or not." It cannot therefore, if we think reasonably on this subject, greatly astonish us, that such a book should give
 " an account of a state of the world, and of
 " human nature, entirely different from the
 " present ; of our fall from that state ; of
 " the age of man extended to near a thousand
 " years ; and of the destruction of the
 " world by a deluge."

Finally, if, in such a book, mingled with the excellencies I have remarked, there should appear some difficulties, some things for which we are not able to account ; for instance,
 " the arbitrary choice of one people, as the

* Analogy of religion, &c. part 2. chap. 2. sect. 2.

“ favourites of Heaven ; and their deliver-
 “ ance from bondage by prodigies the most
 “ astonishing imaginable ;” is there any thing
 more extraordinary here, than, in a composition
 of this nature, we might have previously
 expected to find ? We must be immoderately
 conceited of our own understandings, if we
 imagine otherwise. Those favourites of Heaven,
 it must be likewise own'd, are the countrymen
 of the writer ; but of such a writer, as of all
 historians or annalists, ancient or modern,
 shows the least disposition to flatter his
 countrymen. Where, I pray, do we find him,
 either celebrating their virtues, or palliating
 their vices ; either extolling their genius,
 or magnifying their exploits ? Add to all these,
 that, in every thing which is not expressly
 ascrib'd to the interposal of Heaven, the
 relation is in itself plausible, the incidents
 are natural, the characters and manners such
 as are admirably adapted to those early ages
 of the world. In these particulars, there is
 no affectation of the marvellous ; there are
 no “ descriptions of sea and land monsters ;
 “ no relations of wonderful adventures,
 “ strange men, and uncouth manners *.”

WHEN all these things are seriously attend-

* p. 185.

ed to, I persuade myself, that no unprejudiced person will think, that the Pentateuch bears falsehood on the face of it, and deserves to be rejected without examination. On the contrary, every unprejudiced person will find (I say not, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than all the miracles it relates ; this is a language which I do not understand, and which only serves to darken a plain question ; but I say, he will find) very many and very strong indications of authenticity and truth ; and will conclude, that all the evidences, both intrinsic and extrinsic, by which it is supported, ought to be impartially canvassed. Abundant evidences there are of both kinds ; some hints of them have been given in this section ; but to consider them fully, falls not within the limits of my present purpose.

C O N C L U S I O N.

WHAT is the sum of all that hath been now discussed? It is briefly this: *That the author's favourite argument, of which he boasts the discovery, is founded in error *, is managed with sophistry †, and is at last abandon'd by its inventor ‡, as fit only for shew, not for use; that he is not more successful in the collateral arguments he employs; particularly, that there is no peculiar presumption against religious miracles ||; that, on the contrary, there is a peculiar presumption in their favour **; that the general maxim, whereby he would enable us to decide betwixt opposite miracles, when it is stript of the pompous diction, that serves it at once for decoration, and for disguise, is discover'd to be no other than an identical proposition, which, as it conveys no knowledge, can be of no service to the cause of truth ††; that there is no presumption, arising either from human nature ‡‡, or from the history of mankind |||, against the miracles said*

* Part 1. sect. 1.	† sect. 2.	‡ sect. 3.
sect. 4.	** sect. 5.	†† sect. 6.
‡‡ Part 2. sect. 1.	sect. 2.	

*to have been wrought in proof of Christianity; that the evidence of these is not subverted by those miracles, which historians of other religions have recorded *; that neither the Pagan †, nor the Popish ‡ miracles, on which he hath expatiated, will bear to be compar'd with those of holy writ; that, abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been miracles in former times ||; and, lastly, that his examination of the Pentateuch is both partial and imperfect, and consequently stands in need of a revival **.*

“OUR most holy religion,” says the author in the conclusion of his essay, “is founded
 “on faith, not on reason; and ’tis a sure
 “method of exposing it, to put it to such a
 “trial, as it is by no means fitted to endure.”
 If, by *our most holy religion*, we are to understand the fundamental articles of the Christian system, these have their foundation in the nature and decrees of God; and, as they are antecedent to our faith or reasonings, they must be also independent of both. If they are true, our disbelief can never make them false; if they are false, the belief of all

* Part 2. sect. 3. † sect. 4. ‡ sect. 5.

|| sect. 6. ** sect. 7.

the world will never make them true. But as the only question between Mr Hume and the defenders of the gospel, is, Whether there is reason to believe those articles? he can only mean by *our most holy religion*, our belief of the Christian doctrine: and concerning this belief we are told, that it is founded on *faith*, not on reason; that is, our faith is founded on our faith; in other words, it hath no foundation, it is a mere chime-ra, the creature of a distemper'd brain. I say not, on the contrary, that *our most holy religion* is founded on *reason*, because this expression, in my opinion, is both ambiguous and inaccurate; but I say, that we have sufficient reason for the belief of our religion; or, to express myself in the words of an apostle, that the Christian, if it is not his own fault, *may be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a REASON of his hope.*

So far therefore am I from being afraid of exposing Christianity, by submitting it to the test of reason; so far am I from judging this a trial, which it is by no means fitted to endure, that I think, on the contrary, the most violent attacks that have been made upon the faith of Jesus, have been of service to it. Yes: I do not hesitate to affirm, that our religion hath been indebted to the *attempts*, tho' not to the *intentions*, of its bitterest enemies.

enemies. They have tried its strength indeed, and, by trying, they have display'd its strength; and that in so clear a light, as we could never have hop'd, without such a trial, to have view'd it in. Let them therefore write, let them argue, and, when arguments fail, even let them cavil, against religion, as much as they please: I should be heartily sorry, that ever in this island, the asylum of liberty, where the spirit of Christianity is better understood (however defective the inhabitants are in the observance of its precepts) than in any other part of the Christian world; I should, I say, be sorry, that in this island, so great a disservice were done to religion, as to check its adversaries, in any other way, than by returning a candid answer to their objections. I must at the same time acknowledge, that I am both ashamed and griev'd, when I observe any friends of religion, betray so great a diffidence in the goodness of their cause (for to this diffidence it can only be imputed) as to show an inclination for recurring to more forcible methods. The assaults of infidels, I may venture to prophesy, will never overturn our religion. They will prove not more hurtful to the Christian system, if 'tis allowed to *compare small things with greatest*, than the boisterous winds are said to prove to the sturdy oak. They shake it impetuously for a time, and
loudly

loudly threaten its subversion; whilst, in effect, they only serve to make it strike its roots the deeper, and stand the firmer ever after.

ONE word more with the essayist, and I have done. "Upon the whole," says he, "we may conclude, that the *Christian religion*; not only was at first attended with "miracles, but even, at this day, cannot be "believ'd by any reasonable person without "one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity; and whoever is "moved by faith to assent to it;" that is, whoever by his belief is induced to believe it, "is conscious of a continued miracle in "his own person, which subverts all the "principles of his understanding, and gives "him a determination to believe, what is "most contrary to custom and experience." An author is never so sure of writing unanswerably, as when he writes altogether unintelligibly. 'Tis impossible that you should fight your enemy before you find him; and if he hath screen'd himself in darkness, 'tis next to impossible that you should find him. Indeed, if any meaning can be gather'd from that strange assemblage of words just now quoted, it seems to be one or other of these which follow: *either*, That there are not any
in

in the world, who believe the gospel ; *or*, That there is no want of miracles in our own time. How either of these remarks, if just, can contribute to the author's purpose, it will not, I suspect, be easy to discover. If the second remark is true, if there is no want of miracles at present, surely experience cannot be pleaded against the belief of miracles said to have been perform'd in time past. Again, if the first remark is true, if there are not any in the world who believe the gospel, because, as Mr Hume supposeth, a miracle cannot be believed without a new miracle, why all this ado to refute opinions which nobody entertains ? Certainly, to use his own words, " The knights-errant, who wander'd about " to clear the world of dragons and giants, " never entertain'd the least doubt concerning the existence of these monsters *."

Might I presume faintly to copy but the manner of so inimitable an original, as the author hath exhibited in his concluding words, I should also conclude upon the whole, That miracles are capable of proof from testimony, and that there is a full proof of this kind, for those said to have been wrought in support of Christianity ; that whoever is mo-

* See the first paragraph of Essay 12. Of the academical or sceptical philosophy.

ved, by Mr Hume's ingenious argument, to assert, that no testimony can give sufficient evidence of miracles, admits for *reason*, tho' perhaps unconscious, a mere *subtilty*, which subverts the evidence of testimony, of history, and even of experience itself, giving him a determination to deny, what the common sense of mankind, founded in the primary principles of the understanding, would lead him to believe.

T H E E N D.



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